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**Black and Asian British Life Writing: Race, Gender and
Representation in Selected Novels from the 1990s**

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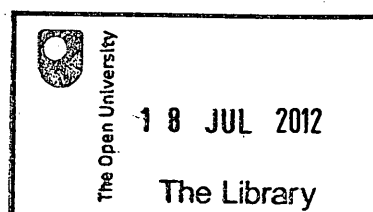
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores six post-1990s black and Asian British women novelists and the ways in which they utilise life writing strategies in their novels. Using a comparative approach, it explores how their novels are informed by issues of diaspora, hybridity and cultural identity, and how these questions are implicitly linked to the autobiographical nature of their novels. Attention is paid to how these novelists represent their individual subjective identities and how their particular experiences are linked to the narrative structures of their novels. My contention is that these novelists employ autobiographical strategies in their novels to challenge in fictional form the dominant discourses of race, gender and cultural identity, and that such strategies allow these authors to re-imagine and re-assert their subjectivities in fiction. As a frame for my analysis, I focus on three themes – the politics of location, the notion of trauma and the narration of family – and examine how these six novelists utilise autobiographical strategies in order to explore these issues. This approach allows me to both identify some key characteristics which are common to black and Asian British women's life writing as well as highlight differences which point to the diversity of this body of literature. My theoretical framework draws heavily on, first, feminist and postcolonial theorists and critics of autobiography and life writing and, second, black British cultural theorists and critics. Throughout the thesis, I interrogate the limitations of existing feminist and postcolonial autobiography and life writing theories when applied in this context, and address concerns over certain aspects of existing black British cultural theory.



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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s, numerous novels by black and Asian British women were published. Critical studies of this body of literature have principally focused on issues of cultural identity, diaspora and hybridity, and such theoretical lenses have yielded important insights. However, they have limitations in terms of understanding the potential of these novels. To date, there has been little attention to the frequently autobiographical nature of these novels and the way they utilise the genre of life writing. Reading these novels with the theoretical insight of life writing in mind sheds new light on what these novels are all about and is the key to unlocking the potential of them.

This thesis explores post-1990s black and Asian British women's novels and the ways in which they have been informed by life writing. It focuses on six black and Asian British women novelists who have in common the use of life writing: Atima Srivastava, Shyama Perera, Lucinda Roy, Joanna Traynor, Andrea Levy and Jenny McLeod.¹ It argues that life writing offers the novelist an opportunity to challenge in fictional form the dominant discourses of race, gender and cultural identity and to re-imagine and re-assert her subjectivity and agency in fiction. I use the term subjectivity in this thesis to refer to the formation of individual selfhood in relation to the world. As such, it is always in process and produced through discourse.²

¹ Atima Srivastava, *Looking for Maya* (London: Penguin, 1999); Shyama Perera, *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* (London: Sceptre, 1999); Lucinda Roy, *Lady Moses: A Novel* (London: Virago, 1998); Joanna Traynor, *Sister Josephine* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997); Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon* (London: Headline Review, 1999); Jenny McLeod, *Stuck Up a Tree* (London: Virago, 1998). All further references are to these editions and included in the text.

² In this regard, I follow Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn and Valerie Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 3: 'we use "subjectivity" to refer to individuality and self-awareness – the condition of being a subject – but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these – the condition of being a subject'. And, Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 33: subjectivity 'is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak'.

The six novelists selected here must be distinguished, first, from an earlier generation of black and Asian British women authors, and secondly, from their high profile successors Zadie Smith (2000) and Monica Ali (2003), whose award-winning novels appeared in the early years of the new millennium.³ This thesis argues that these six novelists represent a new generation of writers quite distinct from the authors of the 1980s. In that earlier period, poetry, drama and short stories published in anthologies – as a collective voice – were the predominant form.⁴ Whereas for the earlier generation collective identity as black women was crucial in the struggle for access to representation, for the generation of authors analysed here, individual subjectivities are more important.

This thesis is rooted in a particular post-war history of black and Asian British women's life writing. However, there is a far longer history of life writing by black and Asian women in Britain. Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince* was published in three editions in 1831, only a few decades after the publications of Ignatius Sancho's *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho* (1782) and Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789).⁵ Prince was born into slavery in Bermuda in 1788 and brought to London in 1828, where she sought her freedom. For her, London was a refuge from the horrors of slavery she had experienced in the West

³ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000); Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Doubleday, 2003). As of 22 October 2010, *White Teeth* had sold 731,000 copies in the UK and *Brick Lane* 658,000. Data obtained from Nielsen BookScan. Personal correspondence.

⁴ In the 1980s, only a few novels by black and Asian women authors focusing primarily on Britain were published: Rukshana Smith, *Sumitra's Story* (London: Bodley Head, 1982); Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging* (London: Women's Press, 1985); Joan Riley, *Waiting in the Twilight* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Ravinder Randhawa, *A Wicked Old Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Joan Riley, *Romance* (London: Women's Press, 1988). By contrast, the predominant form was poetry and short stories published in anthologies: Barbara Burford, Gabriela Pearse, Grace Nichols and Jackie Kay, *A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets* (London: Sheba, 1985); Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins, *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Lauretta Ngcobo, *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1987); Asian Women Writers' Workshop, *Right of Way: Prose and Poetry by the Asian Women Writers' Workshop* (London: Women's Press, 1988); Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis and Pratibha Parmar, *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (London: Sheba, 1988).

⁵ Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, related by Herself* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1831); Ignatius Sancho, *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho* (London, 1782); Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by Himself* (London, 1789).

Indies, and as such her narrative differs from the six novels discussed in this thesis.

More importantly, however, she related her story to Susannah Strickland Moodie, who was staying with Mr and Mrs Pringle, where Prince worked as a servant, and Thomas Pringle wrote the preface for the book. In this sense, it bears similarities to Rachel Barton's *The Scarlet Thread: An Indian Woman Speaks* (1987), in which an Asian British woman relates her experience of escaping from an arranged marriage to her friend.⁶ This mediated life narrative suggests a different form of life writing from the ones examined in this thesis. The direct intervention of the editor implies a certain hierarchy between the subject of the story, Prince, and the editor, Pringle, whose name accredits the story authority. As Lyn Innes says, the editor's preface and title page 'emphasize its status as an authoritative truthful history'.⁷ In the historical context of anti-slavery and abolitionist movements in early nineteenth century Britain, the issue of truth is important. Having been denied freedom and the right to speak, such a narrative is burdened with representing the horrors of slavery truthfully and, as Innes argues, 'she speaks and bears witness on behalf of all slaves'.⁸ Prince's life writing arises from a different historical context than the novels under scrutiny in this thesis, and it relies less on fiction to challenge dominant ideologies of race and gender.

In other ways, Mary Seacole's *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) use the form of life writing to interrogate and represent the self.⁹ Being mixed-race, Seacole takes pride in both her mother's black heritage and her father's Scottish heritage, but, as I also discuss in Chapter 3, being mixed-race does not mean she is not subject to racism. By contrast to Prince, Seacole travelled freely to England to serve as a nurse in the Crimean War (1853-1856). While experiencing racism in

⁶ Rachel Barton, *The Scarlet Thread: An Indian Woman Speaks* (London: Virago, 1987)

⁷ C. L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 61.

⁸ Innes, p. 67.

⁹ Mary Seacole, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (London: James Blackwell, 1857)

London, she is welcomed in the Crimea and accepted by the soldiers. Throughout her narrative, she describes her experiences in the Crimea and London almost as a chronicler of the period. Although *The Wonderful Adventures* follows the chronological conventions of traditional autobiography, her representation of selfhood is less conventional. She represents herself, variably, as mixed-race, a nurse and a housekeeper. By contrast to Prince's narrative, Seacole's autobiography is decidedly more individuated and a careful crafting of the self, and not a plea for the abolition of slavery. At the same time, however, she does not employ fiction to explore and represent herself and, in this respect, it differs from the novels under discussion in this thesis.

In the twentieth century, women such as Cornelia Sorabji and Beryl Gilroy employed forms of life writing to convey their experiences. Sorabji, the first Indian woman to sit the law exams in Britain, describes in her autobiography, *India Calling* (1934), the many prominent people she met while studying at Oxford.¹⁰ Of both Parsi, Indian and English descent, Sorabji valorises her triple heritage and does not denounce the English Empire. Instead, her autobiography gives voice to the plight of women confined to purdah. As such, Sorabji uses the broad category of life writing to challenge orthodox conventions of gender roles. This is also found in Gilroy's autobiographical novel, *Black Teacher*, in which she narrates her time as a headteacher in a London school. In many ways, Gilroy's novel is a rebuttal to E. R. Braithwaite's *To Sir, With Love* (1957), which detailed Braithwaite's experiences as a black headteacher, but Gilroy is concerned with the specific experiences of being black and a woman in a predominantly white, male environment.¹¹ Gilroy's novel bears many similarities to the novels examined in this thesis – it incorporates plot, dialogue and exploration of

¹⁰ Cornelia Sorabji, *India Calling: The Memories of Cornelia Sorabji*, ed. by Elleke Boehmer and Naella Grew (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004 [1934])

¹¹ Beryl Gilroy, *Black Teacher* (London: Cassell, 1976); E. R. Braithwaite, *To Sir, With Love* (London: Bodley Head, 1959)

subjectivity – but it responds to a different period in British history. Indeed, while other West Indian British authors such as Sam Selvon and George Lamming had achieved recognition by the 1960s, Gilroy struggled to get her novel published because she was a woman.¹²

These early examples of black women's life writing in Britain indicate the strategic usefulness of the broad form of life writing to challenge and counter dominant representations of race, gender and cultural identity in various historical contexts. However, at the same time, this does not signify a continuous tradition of black and Asian British women's life writing from Prince and Seacole over Cornelia Sorabji writing in the 1930s to Beryl Gilroy in the 1970s. Life writing is a particularly useful tool for these authors in the 1990s, because of their distinctive experiences, which coalesces not in autobiography or the short story, but in the novel. The life writing of Prince, Seacole, Sorabji and Gilroy responded to the pressures of different historical moments; the 1990s and 2000s present new pressures and demands for black and Asian British women authors. The marketing of black and Asian British women's writing, for instance, has changed dramatically since Gilroy's *Black Teacher* was published.

The extensive critical and popular attention directed at the novels of Smith and Ali has in a short space of time given them canonical status. However, my thesis argues that the six novelists in this study warrant critical scrutiny, and reveal at least as much of interest about black and Asian British women's experience in post-1990s Britain. The canonical status swiftly given to Smith's *White Teeth* and Ali's *Brick Lane* exemplifies a tendency towards a critical myopia in the mainstream media that elides the diversity and range of black and Asian British women's writing. Moreover, when such critical attention is focused narrowly on the reception of well-marketed authors, it points to the dangers of singling out such figures as exemplary female representatives of late

¹² Sandra Courtman, 'Not Good Enough or Not Man Enough? Beryl Gilroy as the Anomaly in the Evolving "Black British Canon"', in *A Black British Canon?*, ed. by Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 50-73.

twentieth-century multiculturalism.¹³ Graham Huggan has made a similar observation in relation to literary prize culture and the commoditisation of the Booker Prize. As he has said, 'the Prize has participated in a process of canonisation which, as such processes will, tends to reproduce the value-systems of "culturally and otherwise dominant members of a community"'.¹⁴ In order to move beyond the kinds of pitfalls suggested by Huggan above, this thesis intends to look in depth at the complexity of issues surrounding the emergence of such novels.

Focusing especially on the genre of life writing, the thesis asks: In what ways does life writing inform these six novels? What are the key characteristics of black and Asian British women's life writing? In what ways do questions of race and gender impact on the kinds of writing produced and in what ways do these questions affect the subject matter? How does life writing as a genre offer female black and Asian British writers an appropriate means to explore and narrate their particular experiences? And how does contemporary black and Asian British women's life writing offer new ways of reading life writing theory?

The six novels under scrutiny are not strictly autobiographies but fictions that incorporate autobiographical material and operate along a continuum that blurs the line between autobiography and fiction. As such, they are examples of life writing, which is a looser – and extremely capacious – term that encompasses other forms such as autobiography, testimony, personal narrative, photography, oral history and so on.

¹³ Dominic Head, 'Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium', in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 106-19 (p. 106): '*White Teeth* ... is artfully constructed as the definitive representation of twentieth-century British multiculturalism'. See also Claire Squires, *Zadie Smith's White Teeth: A Reader's Guide* (New York; London: Continuum, 2002); Tracey Walters, *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays* (New York; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008); Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 177-82; Ruth Maxie, "'Representative" of British Asian Fiction?: The Critical Reception of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*', in *British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary*, ed. by Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Sim (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), pp. 217-36; Harriet Lane, 'Ali's in wonderland', *Observer*, 1 June 2003
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/jun/01/fiction.features1> [accessed 14 May 2011]

¹⁴ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 119.

While the six novels are fictions, their representation of subjectivities as well as stylistic forms renders analyses of them through autobiography and life writing criticism useful.¹⁵

In my analysis of these six novels, I am particularly interested in, firstly, comparing and contrasting representations of subjectivity and, secondly, form. I draw heavily on the insights of two broad fields of existing scholarship: first, theorists and critics of autobiography and life writing and, second, black British cultural theorists and critics. The first section of this Introduction will define life writing. Here, the thesis will take the work of Sidonie Smith, Susan Stanford Friedman, Estelle Jelinek, and Liz Stanley as a point of departure to show how feminist criticism has in fact opened up the field to postcolonial critics such as Mary Louise Pratt and Bart Moore-Gilbert who have recently begun to address similar issues in different ways.¹⁶ Stemming from a differently-orientated discourse, theorists of race and diaspora such as Robin Cohen, Avtar Brah, Stuart Hall, Carole Boyce Davies and Kobena Mercer have also mapped an illuminating vocabulary and method for investigating the fiction of these six novelists.¹⁷ In the second section, therefore, I will briefly survey their insights, and discuss how I

¹⁵ Margaretta Jolly, 'Editor's Note', in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. ix, uses the term life writing 'because of its openness and inclusiveness across genre, and because it encompasses the writing of one's own or another's life On this basis, it is also appropriate to shelter under life writing's umbrella several entries on life story originating outside of the written form, including testimony, artifacts, reminiscence, personal narrative, visual arts, photography, film, oral history, and so forth'.

¹⁶ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writing*, ed. by Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 34-62; Estelle Jelinek, 'Introduction', in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Estelle Jelinek (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1980), 1-20; Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁷ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996); Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-237; Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black Film/British Cinema*, ed. by Kobena Mercer (London: ICA, 1987), pp. 27-31; Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', *Third Text*, 10, spring (1990), pp. 61-78.

intend to use their ideas as a starting-point for my analysis of the six novelists in the chapters which follow.

Life Writing

Life writing started out equalling autobiography but has now expanded to include other forms of writing about the self such as *testimonio*, confession, apology and the novel. In including the novel as a form of life writing, this thesis expands the remit of life writing. Life writing, as distinct from strict autobiography, is a broad definition of various kinds of self-representations, and it is often a blend of these forms of self-representation.

Similarly to autobiography, life writing offers the subject an opportunity to explore her selfhood and represent her past to an audience. Most importantly, the form allows the author to consider the ways in which she has been constructed and represented by dominant discourses in society and, conversely, to narrate her subjective experiences.

However, from early on, critics of autobiography have struggled to come to term with the impossibility of capturing the self in writing. As Roy Pascal says, the

‘reconstruction of life is an impossible task’, which is why, he says, ‘autobiography is a shaping of the past’, which ‘imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story’.¹⁸ Life writing, on the other hand, embraces this inherent difficulty of

representing the self, and it allows the author to experiment with the ways in which she narrates her subjectivity. In many cases, this involves incorporating fictional elements, partly because of the difficulty in remembering certain experiences. Moreover, it often

defies the notion of a coherent life story, but promotes fragmented and non-

chronological narratives, where the subject’s life comprises various disconnected

experiences of migration, diaspora and historical silencing that have impacted on her

sense of self. Furthermore, life writing also often includes the writing of another’s life

¹⁸ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 9.

story. In other words, whereas autobiography is the representation of the self, life writing may include biographical stories of family members and friends, told from their perspective, interspersed in the autobiographical narrative.

Traditional autobiography is often described as the mature and coherent subject taking stock of his or her life. As Pascal says, 'autobiography is the product of maturity' describing how 'one has found the way to the realised self'.¹⁹ Pascal's vision of autobiography does not adequately capture other forms of life writing, such as confession and *testimonio*. Since St. Augustine's *Confessions* (ca. AD 398-400) through to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), the subgenre of confession has been prominent in life writing.²⁰ Augustine's *Confessions* is an introvert confession to God, where he seeks redemption from former sins. This, argues Linda Anderson, requires 'a private and increasingly inward kind of soul-searching'.²¹ Rousseau's *Confessions*, by contrast, offers a secular approach to the exploration and representation of the self, where redemption is not found in God but in Nature. Whether confessing to God or a human being, the subgenre of confession requires an interlocutor, a reader or listener, who has the power to absolve the subject from former errors in life. At the same time, though, it is through the act of confession that the subject interrogates her or his identity. The notion of confession is developed further in Chapter 3.

In many ways, the confession bears similarities to the subgenre of *testimonio*. Whereas the confession allows the subject to narrate her or his wrongdoings, *testimonio* offers the subject to bear witness to errors committed against her or him. The term, notes John Beverley, emerges as a narrative genre in the 1960s 'in close relation to the movements of national liberation'.²² The subgenre is particularly suited for those whose

¹⁹ Pascal, p. 175.

²⁰ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. by Stacy Magedanz (New York: Chichester, 2004 [ca. AD 398-400]); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, ed. by Peter France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

²¹ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 22.

²² John Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35, 1 (1989), p. 12.

voices have been excluded from dominant narratives. As Beverley argues, *testimonio* 'has to involve an urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on'.²³ As with confession, *testimonio* requires a reader or listener, who can witness and absolve the subject of responsibility for these crimes committed against her. In Chapter 3, I discuss how *testimonio* is used in Joanna Traynor's novel.

In various ways, these two subgenres of life writing – and others such as oral narrative, biography and journal entries – are found in the novels under examination in this thesis. At the same time, however, these six novels employ fiction and warrant examination as literary forms, where features such as plot and dialogue are present. For this reason, I use the term life writing to describe novels where the authors use various subgenres to explore and represent their subjectivity.

The six novels to be examined here are not strictly autobiographies but fictions by black and Asian women that incorporate autobiographical material. A common definition of traditional autobiography is one that often reverts to descriptions that focus on a mainly male and 'retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, [and] in particular on the development of his personality'.²⁴ This descriptive definition of autobiography, as the quote above illustrates, highlights a 'masculine-centred' world-view, which has dominated autobiography and life writing criticism since its beginning until the intervention of feminist and postmodern criticism in the 1980s. As Sidonie Smith argues, autobiography is 'another one of those "master narratives" in the West that, defining the speaking subject as always male, is founded upon the repression of

²³ Beverley, p. 13.

²⁴ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract', in *French Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 192-222 (p. 193).

women'.²⁵ In other words, such narratives are most commonly characterised as conventional linear narratives that order the (male) subject's life into a coherent whole. However, this kind of essentially narrow view does not adequately describe the six novels examined in this thesis or allow for the respective differences of their cultural contexts.²⁶ Clearly, the novels selected here will differ significantly from autobiography as traditionally conceived, both in terms of their exploration of issues concerning subjectivity and their experimentations with form. In terms of subjectivity, these female novelists promote a fragmented and relational sense of cultural identity and significantly, in terms of form, their novels are often non-linear. However, whilst their subjectivities are narrated in relation to others, the novelists ultimately promote a more individualistic as opposed to collective subjectivity than was the case in black and Asian British women's life writing published in the 1970s and 1980s. In doing so, these novelists challenge homogeneous, collective categorisations according to race and gender, and attempt to assert their individual agency and subjectivity in a variety of contexts which are less familiar, still in the process of development and still require inscription.

Within the range of existing scholarship on life writing, two areas are especially relevant to the novels I examine: the feminist and the postcolonial. Feminist theorists and critics of autobiography and life writing have provided useful models for exploring the issue of subjectivity in life writing. In terms of subjectivity, the six novelists narrate their identities as relational; and three of them promote models of fragmented subjective identities. The six novels centre on the main character's formation of subjectivity in relation to family members, friends and romantic interests. In these relationships, the

²⁵ Sidonie Smith, 'The Impact of Critical Theory on the Study of Autography: Marginality, Gender, and Autobiographical Practice', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 3 (1987), p. 2.

²⁶ This masculine definition of autobiography held sway until what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson identify as the third wave of autobiography criticism. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 128.

novelists narrate themselves as gendered and racialised subjects that embrace various diasporic histories. In similar ways, Sidonie Smith, for example, has argued that due to the many ways women are placed at the margins of society, they have resisted masculine constructions of subjectivity by embracing the ‘polyphonic possibilities of selfhood’ and promoting a fragmented sense of subjectivity.²⁷ Her argument provides a useful model for considering how three of the six selected authors resist dominant constructions of subjectivity by narrating their selfhood into various overlapping diasporic narratives.

The six authors examined here also resist the homogeneous group identity imposed on their collective minority status and promote their own individual subjectivities. In fact, in *Looking for Maya, Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* and *Sister Josephine*, the narrators do not engage – in any sustained way – with the collective struggles of black and Asian people in Britain or the shared histories of colonialism, but remain focused on asserting their individual subjectivities in Britain. By contrast, in their novels, Levy, McLeod and Roy narrate their individual subjectivities into the collective histories of the past through family memories. As a useful model for narrating this sense of selfhood emerging in-between the individual and the collective in life writing, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that women ‘project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor is it purely collective. Instead, this new identity merges the shared and the unique’.²⁸ Similarly, I will argue that three of the selected authors form their individual subjectivity in relation to friends and family members and what emerges are in-between – or hybrid – identities.

Current feminist criticism also opens up pathways into a reading of these authors in terms of their experimentation with genre and form. In this thesis, I will argue that the sense of selfhood greatly informs the choice of form. While *Looking for Maya*,

²⁷ Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 59.

²⁸ Friedman, p. 40.

Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet and *Sister Josephine* follow the traditional linear form of storytelling, *Fruit of the Lemon*, *Stuck Up a Tree* and *Lady Moses* are non-linear and non-chronological in their progression. In other words, the storyline alternates between the author's immediate present and her past, often including stories of other family members. This suggests a representation and understanding of subjectivity as always in progress, effectively negotiating the present through the histories of the past. Due to the historical rift of diaspora, many blacks and Asians have a fragmented sense of history. Consequently, as I will demonstrate in Chapters 2 and 3, the three novels that explore collective diasporic histories are non-linear and non-chronological. In other words, the storyline alternates between the author's immediate present and her past, often including stories of other family members. This suggests a representation and understanding of subjectivity as always in progress, effectively negotiating the present through the histories of the past. My contention relies on Estelle Jelinek's argument that, due to the multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles, 'irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self-portraits by women'. Such narratives, in other words, are rarely 'chronological and progressive' but instead 'disconnected, fragmentary, or organised into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters'.²⁹ Her understanding provides a useful tool for exploring the narration of collective past histories. However, my argument also departs from Jelinek in my analysis of *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*, *Looking for Maya* and *Sister Josephine*. In these cases, as I will show in Chapters 1 and 3, the linear form is appropriate for the first three authors to represent their individual subjectivities as located and belonging emphatically in Britain.

All six novelists utilise the genre of autobiography to explore and narrate their individual experiences. It is instructive here to bear in mind Liz Stanley's argument that 'it was the *novel* and not autobiographical writing that initially enabled women to make

²⁹ Jelinek, p. 17.

directly referential claims for the female self'.³⁰ However, in order to consider the ways in which black and Asian British women have employed autobiographical elements in the contexts of their work, her assertion warrants more exploration. Since autobiography, as Sidonie Smith says, has traditionally been the prerogative of men, women's subjectivity is often 'a nonstory, a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture'.³¹ Women's autobiography, argues Liz Stanley in similar terms, 'necessarily relies on fictive devices in producing any and every account of the self'.³² However, if it is argued that female authors rely on fiction in their narration of selfhood, I will argue that – from the other end of the continuum that exists between autobiography and fiction – these six black and Asian novelists rely on autobiographical devices in order to produce an account of the self. Moreover, if poststructuralist interventions in autobiography criticism have dismantled the author's intentions, I will argue that these six novelists use autobiography in their fictions to re-assert their subjectivities. In other words, for those who have had less access to self-representation, authorial intention is crucial, because it allows her to confront the ways in which she has been represented by others.

As will be apparent, such feminist interventions have opened up the field of autobiography criticism to interpretations that challenge orthodox, masculine definitions of autobiography. However, whereas feminist critics have offered new terms of definition – whether 'autogynography' (Stanton) or 'autography' (Perreault) – to describe the writing of female subjectivity, these definitions also are potentially problematic because they tend to privilege the essential category 'woman' without adequately considering the multiple ways identities are also shaped by issues of race.³³

While there is considerable mileage to be gained from feminist insights, I will argue that

³⁰ Stanley, p. 59.

³¹ Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 50.

³² Stanley, p. 62.

³³ Domna C. Stanton, 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', in *The Female Autography: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Domna C. Stanton (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 5-22; Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). I am aware that race is but one of the many issues that impact on the subjectivities of these six novelists.

in relation to the six novels selected for discussion here these observations must be accompanied by an equal attention to the issue of race.

Linda Hutcheon has provided a useful means of clarifying my position. She warns, for instance, of the limitations of a feminist critique that does not combine a challenge to the legacies of colonialism:

The current post-structuralist/postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied and alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses.³⁴

This thesis will similarly emphasise the importance of combining the challenge to male hegemony with a challenge to the continual legacies of colonialism in Britain. In order to do so, however, it will be productive to consider some postcolonial perspectives on life writing.

I argue here in relation to the six black and Asian authors selected that life writing offers a means of challenging the dominant discourses of race that continue to construct black and Asian people as 'others' within their knowledge. The very fluidity of the genre allows each author to negotiate her individual subjectivity in the face of a racism that is predicated on prejudice. This, in turn, enables the authors to define their own specific lives against the restrictive frame of a sometimes imposed collective identity, and allowing the construction of alternative versions of subjectivity and fragmented multiple identities. Frequently, in postcolonial and other minority discourses, the concept of 'autoethnography' has been used to describe autobiographical narratives that offer the author an opportunity to resist dominant representations of race and cultural

³⁴ Linda Hutcheon, "'Circling the Downspout of Empire': Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism", *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 20, 4 (1989), 149-75 (p. 151).

identity.³⁵ One example of this is Mary Louise Pratt's widely circulated use of the term to denote

instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own term. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.³⁶

In Pratt's terms, autoethnographic texts challenge the dominant narratives that have represented colonised people as 'others' within their knowledge. If we apply this definition to the context of Britain, it is clear that this vision of autobiographical writing is also useful for considering the intricate historic connections between Britain and its colonies. Moreover, it suggests that autobiography can become an important strategy for self-assertion and resistance in the face of racism. The concept, however, is also potentially problematic because of the burden of representation it implies, a burden which suggests that the individual only speaks on behalf of the collective. This question will be explored further in the following section on black British cultural theory below.

Central to the argument of this thesis is the fact that whilst the six novels under scrutiny were published in the late 1990s, they deal specifically with the experiences of being female and black or Asian in Britain in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. While both Levy's and Roy's novels are partly set elsewhere in the black diaspora, I will argue that the geographical location of Britain – and particularly London – strongly inflects the content and impact of the novels. Bart Moore-Gilbert has recently made a similar case for foregrounding the issue of location in analyses of postcolonial life writing. As he puts it: 'in the postcolonial context auto/biographical Selfhood can

³⁵ Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 99, uses the concept as 'the defining of one's subjective ethnicity as mediated through language, history, and ethnographic analysis'.

³⁶ Pratt, p. 7.

scarcely be conceived separately from socio-spatial concerns'.³⁷ However, whereas Moore-Gilbert provides a general and largely synoptic anatomy of postcolonial life writing, my thesis in contrast focuses on a particular body of novels by black and Asian British women published in the 1990s. In order to further illustrate how my thesis departs from some feminist and postcolonial criticism more clearly, the next section will briefly survey the current historiography of black British cultural criticism.

Black British Cultural Theory

As I have indicated, issues of location, trauma and family are central to the six novels under scrutiny in this thesis. Significantly too, the novelists' subjectivities are also inflected by their experiences of diaspora, cultural identity and gender, which, in turn, impact on their self-representation. In this section, I will consider how the issue of subjectivity has been theorised and articulated by black British cultural critics and how their insights partially determine elements of my argument. These views will be elaborated further in specific chapters which focus on the detailed analysis of individual novels.

The six novelists I am dealing with here were either born in Britain or brought to Britain by their parents at a young age. They belong to a distinctive second generation of black and Asian authors whose experiences are different from those of their parents in that they grew up in Britain. In these novels, the main characters often distinguish themselves from their parents' nostalgia for their 'homeland' elsewhere and represent themselves as belonging to Britain. In this context it will be useful to consider the notion of diaspora. Diaspora is a capacious term which is associated with both migration and settling.³⁸ It is instructive here in both ways: first, as will be demonstrated

³⁷ Moore-Gilbert, p. 66.

³⁸ Cohen, p. ix: 'The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over). When applied to humans, the ancient Greeks thought of diaspora as migration and colonization. By contrast, for Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians the expression acquired a more

in my three main chapters, it denotes the historical experience of dispersal of African and Asian peoples throughout the British Empire. This relates particularly to the history of postwar migration to Britain from its former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. As will be evident in my analysis of Levy's novel, such migration is often accompanied by a desire for a return to the 'homeland', as Robin Cohen argues.³⁹ Moreover, the concept bears witness to the intricate and ongoing connections between Britain and its former colonies and offers a deconstruction of the notion of fixed borders and fixed identities.

Second, however, as I will examine in Chapter 1 in particular, the six authors are concerned with belonging in Britain and have little or no direct experience of migration. In this regard, my use of diaspora also retains a concern with roots and settlement. Avtar Brah's argument that a 'homing desire ... is not the same as desire for a "homeland"' is illuminating as she makes a clear distinction between first and second generation migrants' experience of diaspora.⁴⁰ As she puts it: 'not all diasporas sustain an ideology of "return"'.⁴¹ This sense of belonging – and having the right to belong – in Britain is articulated well through Brah's concept of 'diaspora space', when she argues that

[diaspora space] is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'.⁴²

The experience of diaspora is clearly a major influence in determining the subjectivities of these six novelists. In the tension between a homing desire and the

sinister and brutal meaning. Diaspora signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile. Other peoples abroad who have also maintained strong collective identities have, in recent years, defined themselves as diasporas, though they were neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims of persecution'.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁰ Brah, p. 180.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 181.

desire for a homeland, three of the novelists create a new space for cultural identities where dominant structures of race are deconstructed and new hybrid identities emerge. Moreover, due to the many ways black and Asian people have been represented as 'fragmented and pathological', and positioned at the margins of society and excluded from mainstream history by the dominant population, they often resist such constructions by embracing various overlapping historical narratives.⁴³ As Stuart Hall puts it: 'we should think ... of identity as a "production", [one] which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation'.⁴⁴ As will become evident later, this insightful observation relates to the way the six novelists explore the genre of autobiography to create their own cultural identity.

Although issues of diaspora and cultural identity greatly influence the novels under scrutiny, a discussion of these authors and their novels cannot be divorced from issues of gender. For in these novels, experiences of location, trauma and family are all equally shaped by female subjectivity. As Carole Boyce Davies argues, whereas white women's subjectivity is conceptualised as privileged and uncontested in terms of race, black women's subjectivity 'exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based in the particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which black women exist'.⁴⁵ This observation provides a useful way into the various ways in which the six novelists have been positioned – and position themselves – in narratives of the past. Importantly, in my analysis of the novels, I will examine how these authors negotiate their subjectivities within multiple locations.

As I will demonstrate, the six novelists selected share the collective experiences of racism and sexism, both of which impact on their subjectivities in different ways. Comparing six black and Asian British female novelists – ranging from two authors of

⁴³ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 225

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁴⁵ Davies, p. 8.

South Asian heritage and two authors of West Indian descent to two mixed-race authors – will certainly pinpoint some common features. However, a main thrust of my argument here is that these novels of the 1990s are expressions of individual subjectivities that are different from the collective identity often adopted by earlier generations in the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas black and Asian British authors from the earlier period often published in anthologies as part of a collective and necessary politics of resistance, I argue that the genre of life writing has offered these later authors an alternative means of exploring and narrating their particular individual experiences. I use the term ‘black and Asian’ when making general assertions about the six novelists and, where appropriate, the terms ‘Asian’, ‘black’ or ‘mixed-race’. To clarify this, it will be useful to consider briefly the issue of representation.

Kobena Mercer has shown that in the struggle for access to representation, the collective voice is crucial. However, in such an environment

artists positioned in the margins of the institutional spaces of cultural production are burdened with the impossible role of speaking as ‘representatives’ in the sense that they are widely expected to ‘speak for’ the black communities from which they come.⁴⁶

In order therefore to escape the aesthetic limits of the burden of representation, I argue here that the six novelists selected have not only experimented with form but, more particularly, manipulated the genre of life writing in order to represent themselves in multiple positions. This follows Stuart Hall’s well-known argument that a shift away from the collective, political signifier ‘Black’ to an acknowledgment of the many different histories, traditions and ethnic identities that constitute it is imperative for understanding black and Asian British cultural production.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Mercer, ‘Black Art and the Burden of Representation’, p. 62. See also, Paul Gilroy, ‘Cruciality and the Frog’s Perspective’, in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture*, ed. by Paul Gilroy (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), pp. 97-114.

⁴⁷ Hall, ‘New Ethnicities’, p. 27.

My examination of these novels as instances of life writing contributes to our understanding of the politics of black and Asian British women's fiction. Rather than explore these six novels merely as fiction or strict autobiography, the critical lens of life writing offers a greater appreciation of the possibilities of self-representation for these authors. In other words, to read these novels as life writing illuminates some important changes in British society in the 1990s and signifies the close connections between notions of race, gender and cultural identity, on the one hand, and literary form, on the other. In employing the broader category of life writing, we are able to transcend the often rigid borders between fiction and autobiography, and destabilise the meaning of subjectivity in literary form.

Structure of Thesis

The thesis is conceptually structured around three themes that bear directly on issues of subjectivity and form: the politics of location, the notion of trauma and the narration of family. Each theme runs through all six novels – allowing me to elicit some key characteristics of black and Asian British women's life writing – yet each chapter proceeds with a detailed examination of one theme in particular in order to elicit more specific differences between the novels.

Chapter 1 explores the politics of location – particularly London – and its impact on subjectivities in Atima Srivastava's *Looking for Maya* and Shyama Perera's *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*. In both novels, the intergenerational difference in the experience of diaspora informs the author's subjectivity and the importance of location and belonging. I will demonstrate that, in their effort to assert their right to belong in London, the authors narrate their subjectivities as relational, yet individual, and that, as a consequence, these two novels are linear. Moreover, I will argue that life writing as a genre offers these two authors an opportunity to explore their particular experiences and

to assert their subjectivity and agency into fiction. Finally, I will demonstrate that the issue of location is a significant component in the formation of subjectivity for these two authors, and that this issue challenges traditional views of life writing theory. To support my argument, I draw mainly on theoretical insights from human geographers and black British cultural critics.

In Chapter 2, I return to the intergenerational difference in the experience of diaspora and examine the notion of trauma in Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* and Jenny McLeod's *Stuck Up a Tree*. In these two novels, the failure to pass on collective memories of slavery, colonialism and migration from one generation to the next results in traumatic breakdowns for the main characters. The chapter will argue that the use of life writing allows these two novelists an appropriate means of interrogating and narrating collective traumatic events, and to assert their subjectivities into those narratives. It will be demonstrated how and why these two novelists narrate their subjectivities as fragmented and relational and that, consequently, these two novels are characterised by their non-linear approach. Finally, I will argue that collective traumatic events are a constituent part of their individual subjectivities, and that this issue needs attention from life writing critics. My theoretical models are drawn from trauma theory and black British cultural criticism.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the narration of family through the figure of the mixed-race orphan in Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses* and Joanna Traynor's *Sister Josephine*. The mixed-race characters of these novels both spend time in foster care with a white family. The two issues – mixed-race as a cultural identity and orphanhood as a socially administered practice – complicate the politics of location and the politics of memorialising collective traumatic events. Such issues, I will show, impact on the authors' subjectivities, which are represented as fragmented and relational. While the two mixed-race authors have in common the experience of foster care, I will

demonstrate how those experiences are narrated differently in terms of form. In relation to the central argument of this thesis, I will argue that the form of life writing provides the novelists with an opportunity to negotiate their identities and challenge the legacies of colonialism that continue to influence the politics of family, race and belonging. Moreover, I will argue that these issues need to be considered in order for life writing theory to extend its remit and for black British cultural criticism to fully appreciate the politics of life writing. For my critique, I rely on theories of hybridity, and sociological insights on mixed-race, orphanhood and family structure.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the main findings of the previous chapters and identifies some key characteristics of post-1990s black and Asian British women's life writing. Since my findings are based on six novels, I do not propose this thesis to be exhaustive of the field of black and Asian British women's life writing.

**CHAPTER 1 – WRITING LONDON: LIFE WRITING AND WRITING
LOCATION IN SHYAMA PERERA’S *HAVEN’T STOPPED DANCING YET*
(1999) AND ATIMA SRIVASTAVA’S *LOOKING FOR MAYA* (1999)**

This chapter is concerned with an exploration of the significance of location – in this case London – in Atima Srivastava’s *Looking for Maya* and Shyama Perera’s *Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet*, in which subjectivities are narrated in relation to a specific location.¹ In particular, the role of location is examined in relation to life writing and the possibilities of narrating selfhood as located and belonging in London. In this chapter, I argue that these two authors employ autobiographical elements in their novels to challenge dominant notions of belonging and location, and assert their sense of belonging in London. These are not autoethnographical novels that represent all Asians in London but representations of individual subjectivities. I will demonstrate how these two authors narrate their sense of belonging in London as relational yet individual. Consequently, this chapter argues that, in order to represent such versions of subjective identities, these two novelists employ the linear mode and chronological sense of time in order to assert their belonging in Britain. Moreover, as will be shown, providing two different accounts of growing up Asian in London, these novels contest and extend existing critical studies of black and Asian writing about London. Srivastava, for instance, writes her subjectivity in relation to London in particular, whether she shows

¹ To date, criticism on Srivastava has focused mainly on her first novel, *Transmission* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1992). See John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Sheila Ghose, “‘Young, Gifted and ... Brown!’: British Asians Getting Real in Atima Srivastava’s *Transmission*”, in *British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary*, ed. by Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Sim (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), pp. 255-271; Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions about the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Sara Upstone’s, *British Asian Fiction: Twenty-First-Century Voices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010) deals with both *Transmission* and *Looking for Maya*. Indeed, both Ball and Upstone notice the prominence of London in Srivastava’s novels, yet do not consider this aspect in relation to life writing. Shyama Perera has escaped sustained critical interest so far, but critic S. W. Perera says of *Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet*: ‘Never before has a Sri Lankan novel captured the stresses, strains, and joys of growing up in England with the same authenticity’, ‘Sri Lanka’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 35, 3 (2000), 179-93 (p. 179).

her boyfriend around London's cafes and bars or distances herself from her parents' sense of belonging in India while hanging out in London Town. The sense of location is equally important for Perera, whether she employs pop cultural references of the 1960s and 1970s or recalls her childhood neighbourhood in Paddington playgrounds as different from her mother's Ceylonese cultural identity.

My engagement with the issue of location in these two novels is guided by Paul Gilroy's demand for attention to the intricate connection between the cultural politics of race and the politics of location. Building on the work of Stuart Hall *et al.* (1978), Gilroy argues that,

We must ... confront the extent to which the cultural politics of 'race' reveals conflict over the production of urban meaning and situate the meanings which have already been identified as constitutive of 'race' in their proper place as contending definitions of what city life is about.²

His contention relates to the ways in which dominant white British society has continued to order and locate blacks and Asians into certain areas such as Brixton and the East End in London. Indeed, he argues further that, "Race" has become a marker for the activity of urban social movements and their conflict with urban political systems and state institutions'.³ In light of Gilroy's arguments from the late 1980s onwards, this chapter asks: how have Asian British women novelists vested London with new meaning in the late 1990s? What is the connection between racial identities and urban geographies? And, how have these novelists represented London through life writing? These questions support the larger inquiries of this thesis: How can the key characteristics of black and Asian British women's life writing be defined? In what

² Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 311. See also, Stuart Hall, *et al.*, 'The Politics of Mugging', in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order*, ed. by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts (London; Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1978), pp. 327-339. By the mid-1970s, Hall says, black crime was 'located and situated ... , geographically and ethnically, as peculiar to black youth in the inner-city "ghettos"', p. 329

³ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 312.

ways do questions of race and gender impact on the kinds of writing produced and in what ways do these questions affect the subject matter? In what ways does life writing as a genre offer female black and Asian British writers an appropriate means to explore and narrate their particular experiences? And, in so doing, how does contemporary black and Asian British women's life writing offer new ways of reading life writing theory?

The chapter will first consider some of the critical work undertaken in this area before exploring how black and Asian authors have reciprocally engaged with the formation of subjectivity and the politics of location. My framework for analysing these novels draws on a number of theoretical and critical approaches. First, the insights from human geographers will be used to explore the close connection between the formation of subjectivity and the perception of location, while Michel de Certeau will provide a theoretical model for exploring subjectivity and the act of writing the city.⁴ Second, insights from recent literary criticism will illuminate the centrality of London in black and Asian British literature and highlight the complexities such authors have dealt with.⁵ Third, the chapter will briefly consider how the issue of location has been dealt with by autobiography and life writing critics before engaging with Bart Moore-Gilbert's recent study of the centrality of geography and location in postcolonial life writing.⁶ In both of these two novels, the authors narrate their subjectivities as different from that of their parents', and in particular as different from their parents' experience of location and diaspora. Therefore, the chapter will move on to investigate the intergenerational differences in the experiences of diaspora and location. This will be

⁴ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Boston; London: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1988 [1984])

⁵ James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2004); John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2004)

⁶ Moore-Gilbert, p. 54.

examined, first, in light of Paul Gilroy's suggestion that the concept of diaspora is brought about by a historical rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging.⁷ Second, I will examine how these two authors negotiate their place in London in relation to friends and romantic interests. For my investigation of this aspect, Avtar Brah's notion of 'diaspora space' provides a theoretical model for engaging critically with the idea that new spaces and homes are created in the meetings of migrants and their descendants with those represented as 'indigenous'.⁸ Her concept illuminates the concept's usefulness for a critique of fixed national borders as well as its concern with location and the politics of belonging. Moreover, Stuart Hall's work on cultural identity and diaspora will serve as guidance for understanding diaspora identities in two ways – one looking backward to a 'homeland' and another as always in process in the present.⁹

These critical insights will guide the literary analysis of the two novels. Since a deterritorialised geography of black and Asian British literature has evolved since the 1980s, as a literary context, I will briefly discuss why London still figures largely in black and Asian British women's literature in the 1990s. In order to illustrate one of the shifts within black British cultural politics in the late 1980s, I will then consider Asian British women's literature more specifically. This approach will allow me to consider some of the similarities and differences between Asian British and black British novels about London.

Locating London: Critical Approaches to the Politics of Location

In both novels discussed in this chapter, the magnetic pull of London has drawn the main characters' parents to migrate there in the 1960s. Their migration is emblematic of

⁷ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Race, Identity and Nationalism at the End of the Colour Line* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p. 124.

⁸ Brah, p. 180.

⁹ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', pp. 222, 225.

the powerful role of London in the minds of postcolonial subjects and constitutes part of the larger history of South Asian migration to Britain in that period.¹⁰ This centring of London – and various locations in London – masks how such locations are loaded with meaning. Edward W. Soja argues that relations of power and discipline are inscribed into apparently passive spaces and locations. As he says, the rise of empire ‘successfully occluded, devalued, and depoliticised space as an object of critical social discourse’.¹¹ His argument relates to the way the British Empire projected its imperial power and national identity through certain places and locations such as Big Ben, Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square – metonymically standing in for London as a whole – investing such places with authoritative meaning and identity. As numerous historians have now made clear, the long history of black and Asian people in London challenges such conceptions from the outset.¹² But the dominant structures of power that simultaneously order and universalise London as the centre of Empire also empty the city of meaning because whiteness is conflated with the urban space, rendering the city traditionally a white location.

The two main characters in the two novels, however, challenge the idea that London is a passive location which is already, always constituted as white. As a useful vantage point to examine this aspect, I draw on human geographer John Agnew’s argument that one of the fundamental aspects of place as a meaningful location is a ‘sense of place’, by which he means the subjective and emotional attachment people

¹⁰ Shinder S. Thandi, ‘Migrating to the “Mother Country”, 1947-1980’, in *A South-Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of Peoples from the Indian Sub-Continent*, ed. by Michael H. Fisher, Shompa Lahiri and Shinder Thandi (Oxford: Greenwood World, 2007), pp. 159-181.

¹¹ Soja, p. 4.

¹² See, for example, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984); Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London: Pluto, 1986); Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot: Gower, 1987); Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Gretchen Gerzina, *Black England: Life Before Emancipation* (London: John Murray, 1995); Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1998); Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: the Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1999); Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto, 2001); Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, The National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

have to a place. His argument provides a useful model for confronting the uncontested silences and engaging with the reciprocal relationship between the formation of subjectivity and the sense of location.¹³ His argument stresses the centrality of place and location in people's everyday lives and illuminates how spaces and locations can be invested with meaning through everyday practices. It challenges orthodox views that locations are merely passive settings in which things happen without being .

How do we consider such everyday practices in literature? Michael de Certeau provides a theoretical model for this connection, and argues that this link between subjectivity and sense of location can be constituted through the act of writing the city.¹⁴ Confronting institutional and official strategies that draw up an orderly and stable idea of the city, the act – or ‘tactics’ in de Certeau’s terms – of writing the city as a spatial practice counters the administrative, regulated and panoptic politics of the authorities. Writing about the city, he argues, slowly detaches places from their names and they become ‘liberated spaces that can be occupied’.¹⁵ Although not concerned with black and Asian British literary resistance to the dominant order of London specifically, his notion of writing the city is useful for thinking about what it means to belong to a certain location and how that location impacts on subjectivity.

My analysis of these two novels expands on recent studies of black and Asian British literary representations of London by focusing on how these two authors employ life writing to assert their sense of belonging. In order to illustrate my departure from such studies more clearly, I will briefly discuss how I use these studies for my purposes in this chapter. The centrality of London in contemporary black and Asian British literature has been the focus of much recent literary criticism, whether focusing on

¹³ Agnew, p. 28: ‘Interwoven in the concept of place here ... are three major elements: *locale*, the setting in which social relations are constituted (these can be informal or institutional); *location*, the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction as defined by social and economic processes operating at a wider scale; and *sense of place*, the local “structure of feeling.”’

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1988 [1984]), p. 105.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

broader surveys, one particular author or specific diasporic communities.¹⁶ Three recent studies inform the inquiries in this chapter. In *Dwelling Places* (2003), James Procter argues that diaspora critics have tended to focus on the deterritorialised nature of Britain's black and Asian communities and less on the material locations of cultural production.¹⁷ He addresses this imbalance and examines the role of location in black and Asian British writing from three different historical periods, and argues that it has moved from the central, 'tourist' London in the 1950s and 1960s, through the inner-city streets in the 1970s to the mid-1980s and on to suburban settings in the 1990s.¹⁸ While my chapter extends his inquiry by looking at how location is narrated in life writing, his argument provides a useful critical model for thinking about the role of location in two ways. First, while he rightly argues that, since the 1990s, 'an increasingly non-metropolitan literature, outside the capital of London, becomes available', London is still central to many black and Asian British authors.¹⁹ However, as this chapter will show, even within London, the settings have moved away from the East End and Brixton. Second, by concentrating on contemporary Asian British literature in his final chapters, he argues that this body of writing has been central to the destabilisation of the

¹⁶ For broader, general studies, see for example Jane Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996); John McLeod (ed.), 'Post-Colonial London', special issue of *Kunapipi*, 22 (1999); Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (London: HarperCollins, 2003); Susanne Cuevas, *Babylon and Golden City: Representations of London in Black and Asian British Novels Since the 1990s* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008). For work on one specific author, see for example Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul: Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Susheila Nasta, 'Setting Up Home in a City of Words: Sam Selvon's London Novels', in *Tiger's Triumph: Celebrating Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford (Hebden Bridge: Dangaroo Press, 1995), pp. 78-95; Christine W. Sizemore, 'The London Novels of Buchi Emecheta', in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, ed. by Marie Umeh (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), pp. 367-85; Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Pop Goes the Centre: Hanif Kureishi's London', in *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 133-54; Susanne Pichler, *Buchi Emecheta's 'London Novels': An Intercultural Approach* (Trier [Germany]: WVT, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2001). For studies of particular diasporic communities, see for example, Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; [London]: John Murray, 1995); Stephen Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Procter, p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

essential category 'Black' since the late 1980s.²⁰ Guided by a similar concern, this chapter extends his argument and contends that women have played an equally significant role in destabilising the political alliance between Britain's black and Asian communities. Moreover, focusing on the intricate connections between the formation of subjectivity and the sense of location, the chapter explores the narration of London through the form of life writing.

Focusing specifically on London, John McLeod argues that the 'cheerful' writing at the end of the twentieth century is a sign of the 'perpetual recreation of London in the face of resistance and prejudice, and constitutes its own cultural contribution to the progression of social change'.²¹ While he usefully distinguishes this generation of literature from that of earlier generations – the migration and coming over-novels of the 1950s and 1960s, and the inner city-novels of the 1970s and 1980s – his argument about the transformative potential of the novels – from representing London as monolithic to multicultural – is extended here. This chapter argues that, in addition to this transformative potential, it is also evident that London transforms the author's subjectivity. My chapter investigates the reciprocal relationship between the formation of subjectivity and the experience of location.

John Clement Ball argues convincingly that the generational difference between the earlier generation of writing about London is expressed in the negotiation of private and public spheres – with the earlier generation relegated to the domestic, private setting and the young protagonists interacting in public spaces.²² But Ball criticises these contemporary authors for narrating London with 'temporal and spatial blinders', suggesting that they have little sense of the historical struggles over space and location that black and Asian people in Britain have fought.²³ Such criticism is misplaced

²⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

²¹ McLeod, *Postcolonial London*, p. 188.

²² Ball, pp. 222-4.

²³ Ibid., p. 226.

because it implies that black and Asian British writing should necessarily consider the long history of black and Asian people in Britain. His interpretation shores up a division between black and Asian history as distinct from dominant British history when – on the contrary, as this chapter examines – contemporary black and Asian authors are equally informed by their own British upbringing as by their parents’ colonial history. As will be shown, mainstream British pop culture forms part of each author’s and each protagonist’s subjectivity, rendering the Asian experience of growing up in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s part of – not outside of – mainstream British history. Procter’s, McLeod’s and Ball’s studies are useful because they signal the many ways in which London has figured prominently in black and Asian British literature. In this chapter, however, their studies are complemented by attention to life writing.

My examination of the issue of location in life writing enters a critical lacuna that has only recently been addressed by autobiography and life writing critics.²⁴ The rigid hierarchical and ideological structures of power that universalised London and centred the West have also dominated theories of autobiography and life writing. In orthodox criticism, the issue of location has often been thought of only in abstract terms. Influential critics Georges Gusdorf and Roy Pascal, for instance, argue that autobiography and life writing originated in and belong to the ‘West’, but this ‘West’ remains unspecified.²⁵ Given this critical dearth, my inquiry springs mainly from Bart Moore-Gilbert’s argument that cultural (dis)location is a major characteristic of postcolonial life writing. Postcolonial life writers’ relationship to location, he argues, is often fraught and contested, and varying between a desire for a stable socio-spatial identity (roots) and the liberating migrant identity (routes).²⁶ As will be explored below,

²⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 160-2.

²⁵ Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1980), p 29; Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 22

²⁶ Moore-Gilbert, p. 66.

his argument relates to Paul Gilroy's understanding of diaspora identities suspended between various historical narratives. While Moore-Gilbert's observation is useful for initiating a consideration of the role of shifting locations and (dis)locations in postcolonial life writing, this chapter will extend his critical insights and consider the role location performs specifically in the novels of Perera and Srivastava. If issues of migration and location have played a crucial role in the imagination of anti-imperialism and decolonisation, for contemporary black and Asian British authors the right to belong in Britain is more important. Significantly, for the two authors discussed in this chapter, there is no 'homeland' elsewhere to which they can return – thus there is little or no sense of belonging elsewhere. Indeed, as this chapter will show, these two Asian British authors are concerned with Britain as both location of residence and location of belonging. This intergenerational difference in the experience of location can be usefully explored through the concept of diaspora.

Diasporic London: Intergenerational Difference and Cultural Identity

In this section, I will briefly discuss the notion of diaspora and explain how it is useful for my analysis. In both novels, it is clear that the parents' sense of belonging is linked to their cultural heritage in Sri Lanka or India. Given such cultural attachment to other locations, their experience of migration and diaspora impacts on their sense of being (dis)located, as Moore-Gilbert puts it, in London. The questions of how migration and diaspora impact on the sense of location are usefully articulated by Paul Gilroy. In his understanding, the idea of diaspora challenges notions of fixed borders and problematises the mechanics of rooted belonging. As he puts it, 'it disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness'.²⁷ His understanding

²⁷ Gilroy, *Between Camps*, p. 123.

relates to Soja's argument that, since the rise of Empire in the late nineteenth century, London has been vested with a certain meaning with fixed borders and rooted belonging, based on the mechanics of place, location and identity. Against such fixed ideas of place, the notion of diaspora challenges the 'depoliticised space', in Soja's words, and vests it with new meanings.²⁸ The concept, Gilroy argues, is brought about by 'a historical and experiential rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging', which distinguishes between affiliations to Britain and an imagined 'homeland' elsewhere. However, this emphasis on roots and self-conscious attachment to a location of belonging elsewhere than Britain may hold true for migrants who came to Britain in the postwar years but, as I will demonstrate in my analysis, for the children of those migrants, such connection to a 'homeland' elsewhere is more complicated.

The main characters also explore their sense of belonging in London in relation to their white friends and potential romantic interests, and do not in any sustained way explore collective histories elsewhere or engage with 'Black' politics of resistance. For my exploration of these more individual assertions of belonging in London, Avtar Brah's idea of 'diaspora space' is useful. The term, notes Brah, must not be separated from its concern with a 'homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a "homeland"'.²⁹ Brah's distinction is significant because, as she says, 'not all diasporas sustain an ideology of "return", thus making a useful distinction between first and second generation migrants.'³⁰ On this account, in addition to offering a critique of homogeneous, fixed national borders, diaspora, as understood here, is equally concerned with the politics of location and roots. In this way, the concept provides a useful understanding of these two authors' concern with London and not with their parents' homelands. Following Brah, this chapter suggests that London, as the site of

²⁸ Soja, p. 4.

²⁹ Brah, p. 180.

³⁰ Ibid.

cultural production, should be seen as a 'diaspora space', where migrants and their descendants, as well as those represented as 'indigenous', find home.³¹ Guided by such insights, I argue that location is not vested with notions of ethnic absolutism and national identities.

The two novelists use autobiographical elements to self-consciously narrate their sense of belonging in London. In other words, the act of writing the city is a constant reproduction of selfhood, always in process and always changing the meaning of the city. As a way of describing how such meaning changes in various contexts, Stuart Hall suggests that, instead of thinking of cultural identity in the diaspora as an already accomplished fact, 'diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference'.³² Stressing the possibility of narrating subjectivity in relation to location, Hall's notion of diaspora provides a useful theoretical model for illuminating the possibility of self-conscious attachment to London. Although keen to stress the hybrid and deterritorialised nature of Britain's black and Asian communities, diaspora critics also provide useful understandings of the inherent differences between generations in the experience of diaspora, cultural identity, location of residence and location of belonging. Building on such observations, the next section will briefly discuss the prominence of London in contemporary black and Asian British women's literature.

Writing London: The Literary Context

In this section, I will briefly situate the two novels in relation to other contemporary black and Asian representations of London. Although London has figured prominently in numerous black and Asian British women's novels, using London as a site for an exploration of black and Asian British women's life writing also runs the risk of

³¹ Ibid., p. 181.

³² Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 235.

conflating the city with Britain. Such a conflation is misplaced since other British locations have also been the settings for contemporary black and Asian British women's writing. As Procter argues, since the mid-1980s 'an increasingly non-metropolitan literature, outside the capital of London, [has become] available'.³³ For instance, Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) is set in the fictional town of Tollington, an ex-mining town outside Birmingham that resembles Syal's own childhood in a small ex-mining town outside Wolverhampton.³⁴ Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1999) is set in Edinburgh and Jenny McLeod's *Stuck Up a Tree* (1999) – which will be examined in Chapter 2 – varies in setting between London and Nottingham.³⁵ However, an overwhelming number of contemporary black and Asian British women's novels are set in London – that is, the British location is London while the parents' homelands are often mentioned. In *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), for instance, Andrea Levy's protagonist travels to Jamaica to rediscover her ancestral roots. But such a journey to her parents' homeland serves only to underscore the centrality of London to the character's cultural identity. As the main character says upon returning to London from Jamaica, 'I am the bastard child of Empire' (327), acknowledging her place in Britain as well as her family history elsewhere.

While there are many similarities between the African, Caribbean and South Asian diasporas in London, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to elaborate the creative dialogue that exists between them. Instead, extending Procter's observation that South Asians were marginalised in critical debates about black Britishness, this chapter will engage with two Asian British novels that elaborate existing literary-critical analyses of London. In writing about London, Srivastava and Perera join other Asian British women authors such as Rukhsana Ahmad, Meera Syal, Farhana Sheikh and

³³ Procter, p. 3.

³⁴ Meera Syal, *Anita and Me* (London: Flamingo, 1996)

³⁵ Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998)

Ravinder Randhawa, whose novel *A Wicked Old Woman* has been called the first 'explicitly Asian British novel'.³⁶ This focus on two Asian authors allows a critical consideration of the politics of race and the politics of location, and seeks to disrupt the relegation of Asian British writing to certain venues – the East End and Tower Hamlets – which risks perpetuating the negative associations between race and location.

At first glance, *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* and *Looking for Maya* are strikingly similar. Both novels were published in 1999, at the end of the decade when New Labour had put cultural diversity on the agenda. They are both written by women of South Asian descent. Srivastava was born in Mumbai, India, in 1961, but has lived in London since she was eight, and Perera was born in 1958 in Moscow to Sri Lankan parents and was brought by her mother to London in 1962. Moreover, both novels revolve around the lives of Asian girls and young women in London. Yet, located in different historical periods – Perera's novels spans the years 1966 to 1979, while Srivastava's narrative is set in the early 1990s – both novels also explore and narrate two very different versions of the female Asian experience in London, thus broadening our perspective on Asian British literature. Whereas in *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*, we follow the coming of age of Perera's protagonist, Mala, over thirteen years, from the ages of eight to twenty-one, *Looking for Maya* details one year in the life of Mira Chowdhary from the ages of twenty-four to twenty-five. Perera's novel allows us to follow the formation of the protagonist's identity. In this regard, the novel follows the conventions of the Bildungsroman-genre, an aspect that will be explored further in the analysis of the novel. By comparison, Srivastava's novel details the course of an artist from nascent stirrings to artistic voice, signalling the close connections between the

³⁶ Rukhsana Ahmad, *The Hope Chest* (London: Virago, 1996); Ravinder Randhawa, *A Wicked Old Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Farhana Sheikh, *The Red Box* (London: Women's Press, 1991); Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (London: Doubleday, 1999). For more on Randhawa, see Aamer Hussein, 'Changing Seasons: Post-Colonial or "Other" Writing in Britain Today', *Wasafiri*, 20 (1994), pp. 16-18; Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 182.

formation of subjectivity and the form of life writing. While in *Transmission* (1992), Srivastava explored her experience of the media world, in *Looking for Maya* she narrates the story of how she became an author. As will be examined further in the analysis of her novel, the novel resembles the formal criteria of a *Künstlerroman*.

My analysis of these two novels alongside each other also illustrates a departure from the publishing context of the 1980s. In that earlier period, Asian British authors such as Ravinder Randhawa, Leena Dhingra and others affiliated with the Asian Women Writers Collective often published with smaller, feminist publishing houses such as Sheba, Women's Press and Virago. By contrast, both Srivastava and Perera published their novels with publishing houses – Serpent's Tail, Quartet Books and Sceptre, respectively – that do not focus exclusively on women's writing or Black British literature. This move away from specialist publishers to broader mainstream presses signal an important change in the ways in which Asian British authors became part of the multicultural landscape of Britain in the 1990s. In some ways, these novels paved the way for the mainstream success of Asian women authors such as Monica Ali, Kamila Shamsie and Kiran Desai in the 2000s.

A Little Girl in a Paddington Playground: Shyama Perera's Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet

In what ways does life writing impact on this novel? In my analysis of Perera's novel, I will demonstrate that, much like conventional autobiography, Perera employs life writing to explore her subjectivity and represent her past to the readers. The novel follows traditional autobiography by employing a chronological structure, but Perera consciously uses the genre of the *Bildungsroman* to examine the development of her particular experience of growing up in London. In doing so, the novel negotiates the possibility of fully representing the self by incorporating fiction to give a more accurate

account. While Perera's novel promotes an individual subjectivity distinct from other Asian British experiences of the period, she narrates herself in relation to friends and family, thus defying the traditional male model of coherent subjectivity.

Whereas Srivastava's *Looking for Maya* is set in the early 1990s, Perera's novel is set in the period running from 1966 until 1979. This period was marked by increased institutional racism, embodied by MP Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood'-speech in 1968, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 and the Immigration Act of 1971, which restricted immigration from Britain's New Commonwealth countries into the UK. Inspired by the Black Power Movement in the United States, visits to Britain by Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in the mid-1960s and anti-colonial movements throughout the world, black and Asian people in Britain rallied around the term 'Black' as a political signifier of pride and resistance. Although inspired by the Black Power Politics from the United States, in Britain the term 'Black' does not refer to an innate, biological identity but is instead a cultural construct, which allows the 'Black' population to stage an essential, collective front to white British society and racism. In this political context, argues James Procter, the inner-city streets became the key symbolic venue of the 1970s – it is here the police and the black and Asian community confront each other.³⁷ However, as this analysis will demonstrate, Perera does not locate herself on the inner-city streets of the East End, in confrontation with the police, but in a Paddington playground to the soundtrack of pop culture.

While the essential notion of 'Black' was crucial in the struggle for access to representation, as Hall says, it also tended to elide gender differences within that construct.³⁸ Authors like Buchi Emecheta and Beryl Gilroy validated their experiences by writing highly autobiographical novels, but they were equally criticised for

³⁷ Procter, p. 71.

³⁸ Hall, 'New Ethnicities', p. 27.

abandoning the cause of black and Asian people in Britain.³⁹ In contrast with the politically charged poetry and short stories of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephaniah and Farrukh Dhondy, whose writing engaged with the politics of racism on the streets, the female authors were confined to the domestic sphere, where they were designated as mothers and wives. In her ground-breaking sociological work, *Finding a Voice* (1978), Amrit Wilson describes the often isolated lives of South Asian women in Britain in this period. As she says, 'the isolation and emptiness of Rezia's life', a Bengali woman Wilson interviews, 'is typical of what many Asian women in Britain face. Those who have come from a joint family in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh to live alone with their husbands in Britain suffer the most'.⁴⁰

The conditions Wilson describes for South Asian women in her study are akin to the life that Perera portrays of the main character's mother. In *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*, Mala Fonseka's mother works in the laundry room at the Grosvenor House Hotel but – although isolated from other people – she is not directly placed as a wife, who is dependent on her husband. We learn early on that Mala's father died shortly after they had arrived in London, leaving Mala's mother to care for the family. However, by contrast to my examination of orphanhood in Chapter 3, the death of her father does not lead her to search for a collective cultural identity through her absent father. In the sense that Mala's mother is portrayed as a struggling migrant doing hard manual labour, Perera's novel is comparable to the immigrant novels of, for instance,

³⁹ For more on the marginalisation of black and Asian British women within the collective black movement, see Claudette Williams, 'We are a Natural Part of Many Different Struggles: Black Women Organizing', in *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*, ed. by Winston James and Clive Harris (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 153-64. Buchi Emecheta, *In the Ditch* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (London: Allison and Busby, 1974) and Beryl Gilroy, *Black Teacher* (London: Cassell, 1976)

⁴⁰ Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain* (London: Virago, 1978), p. 17. See also, Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 28: 'However, as women we also bore the responsibility of caring for the home and family. After working all day, we had to return home and face yet more drudgery: cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and tending to the needs of husbands and children'.

Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai.⁴¹ But unlike those novels, Perera's personal take on the period revolves around the young protagonist, whose experience of London in the 1960s and 1970s is remarkably different from those portrayed in the novels of the earlier generation. Indeed, Perera's re-imagination of the period in *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* seeks to de-essentialise the notion of the 'Black' subject while still paying attention to the threats of racism at the time. In this respect, Perera's novel is comparable to Andrea Levy's first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994) and Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses*, which are also set in 1960s London. In the novel, Perera narrates herself into that historical period through the use of numerous pop cultural references. However, if black and Asian British writing from that period was set in the inner city areas – in most cases London – Perera's retrospective take on London is different. Indeed, her novel opens up multicultural London to include other areas that are not necessarily charged with connotations of race. In this regard the novel complicates Gilroy's argument that certain areas are vested with racial meaning. As with Srivastava's novel, Perera narrates her location in London in relation to other people, namely her mother and her friends. In emphasising the main character's relational subjectivity, Perera's novel follows conventional understandings of women's life writing, where, as Friedman argues, conceptions of selfhood are more social and constituted in relation to others.⁴² However, the various ways in which Perera narrates her sense of belonging in London as relational complicates this theoretical model.

The novel revolves around the young Mala Fonseka, who at the outset of the novel is eight years old. Within the first pages of the novel, Perera establishes her main character's relation to her friends and her parents:

⁴¹ Kamala Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man: A Novel* (London: Allen Lane, 1973 [1972]); Anita Desai, *Bye Bye Blackbird* (New Delhi: Orient, 2001 [1971])

⁴² Friedman, p. 40.

Four little girls in a Paddington playground. Four rounds of free dinners, four different social workers, four strains of problem family. It is 1966 and only one has a bag of sweets – and I wasn't going to be her friend unless she gave me one (p. 1).

Moreover, Perera locates her story in the Paddington area of London. In this example, however, we hear nothing of Mala's ancestral heritage in South Asia but soon learn more about this:

Fresh from the Commonwealth, we'd arrived in London full of ambition and purpose just four years previously, but my mother was still cranking up the dream machine when my father decided to die, leaving us alone, alienated and paying four guineas a week to live in one room in Craven Hill Gardens (p. 4).

In this example, Perera narrates her experience of migration into the wider history of postwar migration that brought numerous people from South Asia to Britain. Although new flats were built in Craven Hill Gardens in the early 1960s – around the time Mala's family arrived in London – the flat they live in is small and dilapidated:

As we came into London and passed the imposing houses and hotels on Lancaster Gate, our hopes rose. Close to cobbled mewses full of sports cars, we drew up outside the handsome but peeling four-storey home he'd rented in Craven Hill Gardens. My mother squeezed my hand. But inside it was a rooming house like the rest, and our room on the top floor measured twelve by eight. Within weeks we had frozen pipes and unusable toilets (p. 4).

Here, Perera writes her novel into the tradition of the immigrant novel – that of Desai and Markandaya writing in the 1970s – where high hopes are soon replaced by the reality of London's cold winter smog. But this is not the story Perera wants to tell.

By contrast, here the story is told retrospectively from a child's point of view. The novel can be categorised as a female Bildungsroman, where we follow the protagonist from childhood into adolescence as she experiences various romantic relationships, socialises with friends and forms her subjectivity in relation to others. By contrast to the

traditional (male) definition of the Bildungsroman – as a linear novel of development that chronicles the life of the individual on his way to maturity and harmony – Elizabeth Abel, *et al.*, argue that ‘female fictions of development reflect the tensions between the assumptions of a genre that embodies the male norms and the values of its female protagonists’. In such novels, ‘the heroine’s developmental course is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine encounters the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships, especially those of early childhood’.⁴³ In another context, Mark Stein argues that the Bildungsroman is a dominant form in black and Asian British literature – a genre that is about the formation of the protagonist as well as the transformation of British society as a whole.⁴⁴ The novel is full of self-conscious references to the fact that the protagonist is coming of age, from the reference to Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868) – ‘because that’s what we were: the Little Women. Not Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth, but Mala, Caroline, Janice and Beth’ (pp. 50-1) – to Mala’s mother complaining about her coming of age.⁴⁵ Indeed, other characteristics, such as the generational conflict, the romantic relationship with boys and the search for identity, suggest a straightforward Bildungsroman. However, in contrast with the conventional Bildungsroman, where the protagonist

⁴³ Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover, NH; London: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 11. In *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), Jerome Buckley provides this definition of the genre: ‘A child of some sensitivity grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London). There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also – and often more importantly – his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice’, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁴ Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004)

⁴⁵ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women; or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1868)

travels from the countryside to the Metropolis and back again, Perera's main character does not undertake such a journey. Although Mala migrates from Ceylon to London, this journey is not part of her search for a cultural identity. By contrast, Mala locates individual subjective identity in London. This is most evident in her relationship with her mother. For my investigation of this relationship, it is critically productive to use the concept of diaspora.

Significantly, her mother's colonial experience of Ceylon has not prepared her adequately for life in Britain. As the narrator says after her father dies and they are left alone: '[this is a] country for which my mum's colonial education had not equipped her' (p. 4). Mala places her mother in a different historical, social and spatial context, which contrasts with Mala's life in Britain. As her mother tells Mala about the impossibility of asking for money from relatives, the contrast between their life in Ceylon and in Britain is striking:

Back home we have both money and land, Mala – have you forgotten so quickly? My family has dominated the district for generations. Everyone comes to my father for help and advice. It would be wickedness to bring shame on him (p. 22).

The episode is telling of the difference between her mother's relation to family members and Mala's sense of belonging to a family. For her mother, the experience of diaspora is conditioned by Gilroy's notion of a historical rift between the location of residence and the location of belonging. Moreover, as Brah noted in her idea of diaspora, memories of Ceylon still constitute a part of her mother's cultural identity, whereas for Mala it is more complicated. For her, there is no sense of a 'homeland' elsewhere. Mala thinks that everyone in Ceylon is related somehow. As she says to her friend Janice: 'I think everyone in Ceylon must be related to each other' (p. 22), whereas in Britain, Mala and her mother are alone, except for the aunties and uncles who come by for visits all the time. In this instance, the narrator is aware of a collective

history in Ceylon, but situates herself individually in Britain. The narrator explains: 'In our home all adults were aunties or uncles' (p. 12), but admits to her friend Caroline that they are not all relations but like family anyway. Her mother has brought her Ceylonese culture with her to London: she still cooks curries, wears a sari and the notion of caste is still important to her. As her aunt Mina is getting married to an Englishman, not a Goygama, as she had expected, Mala's mother explains the importance of the caste system:

'Mum, what's a Goygama boy?'
 'The highest caste: like us.'
 'What difference does it make?'
 'It makes a difference to us. Caste marries within caste: they have accepted traditions and beliefs. See, even the Queen preferred a Greek prince to an English commoner.'
 'But there aren't many Ceylonese in London. Does that make Ronnie all right?'
 'It's a shame his father is only a shopkeeper.'
 'Mina's only a nurse.'
 'But you see, Mala, she comes from a family of lawyers. Her father is head of the Ceylonese Bar' (p. 75).

The exchange between the two generations is significant here, because Mala's mother constructs a Ceylonese identity as opposed to the British. However, according to her mother, the Ceylonese identity is further divided into castes that are not to be transcended. Her mother retains her Ceylonese identity by going to the Commonwealth Institute, the Ceylon Student Centre and the Ceylon Women's Association: 'We clutch the past to make sense of the present. To shape the future' (p. 89). When Mala is ailing, her mother boils coriander seeds instead of giving her antibiotics. However, the conflict between Mala's sense of belonging in London and her mother's sense of belonging in Ceylon is perhaps most vividly portrayed in terms of their differing attitudes towards experiences of racism.

Racism is based on the prejudiced idea that certain 'races' have certain traits in common, and that these traits are different and inferior. In other words, racism imposes

a collective identity onto certain ethnic groups.⁴⁶ In the novel, racism seems to affect only her mother, while Mala's experience of growing up in London is seemingly unaffected by racism. Mala's mother is subjected to racism and racist assaults on numerous occasions whereas Mala is relatively protected from that because she feels she belongs in Britain. When Janice Connors' father tells a racist joke, it is aimed at 'Black people. Asian people: like your mum' (p. 9), as Janice explains. Even when faced with racism herself, Mala does not acknowledge this. In an episode where Mala waits outside a local shop, she is approached by an elderly lady, who tells her to go back to where she came from. Furiously, her mother tells Mala:

'She was a Powellite.'

'She didn't say anything about black people.'

'No – she just told an innocent child to get out of her country' (p. 20).

Her mother's understanding of racism is striking in contrast with Mala's innocence.

Later, after her mother has been jostled and spat on outside Paddington Station, Mala, again innocently, tries to understand the incident:

'It was just one man, Mum he's probably sick.'

'In that case the whole country is ailing.' She held my hand as I sat down next to her. 'You must be careful, Mala. You may think you are one of them, but they only see your colour. Their minds are full of filth. They stripped our countries of wealth and now they strip us of our dignity. Bloody skinheads – it's my taxes that pay for them to loiter in the street barracking and attacking people' (pp. 72-3).

Importantly, Mala's mother perceives racism in Britain in the same context as the exploitative nature of British colonialism in Ceylon which emphasises her mother's roots in Ceylon. In school, however, Mala's experience of racism is different. When she and her friend Margaret are 'brought up to date' (p. 66) on the latest skinhead dances by

⁴⁶ For this general definition of racism, I rely heavily on John Solomos, Bob Findlay, Simon Jones and Paul Gilroy, 'The Organic Crisis of British Capitalism and Race: The Experience of the Seventies', in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 9-46.

the girl Flick, Mala is complacent but asks if Flick goes around Paki-bashing. Flick assures her: 'Of course not. I'd hardly be friends with you if I did – not that you're anything like the real Pakis – you're one of us, aren't you?' (p. 67). However, Mala is mostly annoyed because, as a consequence of these assaults, her mother stops Mala from going out. The notion of Paki-bashing is thus placed in a different, more innocent, context, which is more related to Mala's budding adolescence and concerns about going out with her friends. Even when Mala is paid less for doing the same job at a hairdresser she does not confront the racism within that context:

The punters liked me – that much was clear. But while I gave better shampoos, I didn't have the same value to them: I got 5p tips, she got 10p. Was it my chat or was it something else I didn't want to express? Something that made me deeply uneasy' (p. 88).

These episodes of unacknowledged racism, however, serve almost as apologies or confessions by Perera, in which she takes responsibility for her acts.⁴⁷ Admitting that these racist experiences made her uncomfortable, she diminishes their impact on her subjectivity by narrating other stories that are more important to her. In this sense, Perera escapes the burden of representation by emphasising that her own subjective experience of growing up in London was relatively unaffected by racism. While there is a sense of repression of the experience of racism – an issue that will be explored in the Chapter 2 – it is also Perera providing a more nuanced picture of the Asian experience in London in the 1970s. Not oblivious to issues of racism, Mala confronts her unease at a rally against racism organised by her friend Janice. In this case, as a narratological tactics, as de Certeau puts it, Perera narrates her character into the historical experience of racism and political awareness of the 1970s. Doing so, she challenges Ball's claim

⁴⁷ Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 2. The mode of confession will be explored further in Chapter 3.

about writing with 'temporal and spatial blinders' and recognises the historical struggles over space and location.

The meeting is held in Toynbee Hall in Tower Hamlets in the East End of London, known for its large South Asian population and as one of the most deprived areas in Britain. Drawing on her experiences as a reporter in the East End at the time, Perera describes the scene in almost militant phrases: 'At the top of the stairs two crop-haired girls in bomber jackets gave us pamphlets: "Help us in the war against racialism"' (p. 195), and inside they see a 'straight-backed white woman in combat fatigues' (p. 195).⁴⁸ Procter argues that military regalia and uniforms were central to black power organisations and offered an important means of identification.⁴⁹ Significantly, Perera informs us that it is the white people who are organising this which, in turn, then objectifies the 'small Bengali man in cheap cotton flares and a nylon shirt' (p.195), who has had his home fire-bombed. In true spirit of the time, in the eyes of the white people organising the meeting, the Bengali man becomes a token for all 'Black' people in London – black and Asian alike. As Janice says to Mala: 'We're talking about people like you – black people in need of help' (p.195), which makes Mala ponder her mother's outrage at such categorisation: 'We are not black, Mala, we are Asian. We have our own cultures going back thousands of years: how dare they group us with people whose origins are quite alien to ours? Do they not know that black people victimise Asians too?' (p. 196).

The episode is important for its portrayal of the essential political signifier 'Black' as a term for black and Asian people in Britain in the 1970s. However, we also learn that, in contrast to what much black British cultural criticism says, the formation of the political signifier 'Black' happened also at the behest of benevolent white people.

⁴⁸ Shyama Perera, 'Comment Debate: Eng-er-land, Our Eng-er-land: How I have Come to Love the Flag', *Independent on Sunday*, 4 June 2006, p. 36.

⁴⁹ Procter, p. 72.

In this sense, Perera de-essentialises the notion of the 'Black' British subject and, indeed, of the essential 'Asian' subject in Britain. Ultimately, the meeting forces Mala to consider her own identity as a young girl of South Asian descent in Britain in the 1970s. As the narrator says:

I looked at the man whose life was a living hell and felt deeply moved. But it was not, as Jan had intimated, like looking at a brother; at a fellow passenger on the journey through life. We had nothing in common: he was as foreign to me as I myself was feeling in that room. I tried to feel his fear, but all I could feel was sorrow: sorrow that his brownness had brought destruction on his head. And anger that nothing was being done. Like my mum, whose experiences made me weep, but were the experiences of an outsider: and I was not an outsider. I was British. I had drunk from the same fount; had learned the same lessons that spawned this ugliness (197).

We see the protagonist locating herself clearly in Britain as opposed to her mother, who is an outsider. Perera informs us here that, for all the critical discourse on the politicised nature of 'Black Britain' in the 1970s, there are other – more individual – Asian British stories to be told. Commenting on her innocent childhood and few experiences of racism, Perera has said,

It wasn't until I was older and the kids around me were sporting the tonic suits and oxblood loafers of the up-market skinhead that I encountered racism: the taunting lads on our estate, the butcher in Church Street Market who stopped serving Asians and my mum, small, frightened and immobile in a sari, face down on a station platform, pushed off a Tube train by a skinhead while city 'gents' turned their faces.⁵⁰

While Mala locates herself in Britain as opposed to her mother's home in Ceylon, she also places herself in the local area of Paddington with her friends, transcending the locations Asians have traditionally been relegated to by the hidden hierarchical and ideological structures of power, as Soja argues. In doing so, she vests these locations with new meanings that challenge traditional perceptions of how Asians have

⁵⁰ Perera, 'Comment Debate', p. 36.

represented their place in London. Perera narrates her main character into a specific historical and spatial context that requires attention.

Relating to McLeod's vision of 'millennial optimism' regarding black and Asian British writing about London, Perera offers a different perspective of London as a 'diaspora space', where four girls of different ethnic backgrounds grow up together. The novel revolves around the coming of age of these girls in Paddington where – although going through many of the same experiences – each of them represent an individual story that, taken together, make up part of the multifaceted pattern of London in the 1960s and 1970s. As such, Perera's novel resembles Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), where the main character, Karim, is the product of the pop music of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵¹ But, extending this pop cultural vision of London, Perera offers a gendered perspective that contributes to the destabilisation of the essential, political signifier 'Black'.

Instead of embracing her mother's collective, shared cultural identity, Mala narrates her subjectivity in relation to her friends in Paddington. In doing so, she embraces a different collective cultural identity that is based on other issues than race. At age eight, Mala Fonseka has three best friends who all live in the same area: Bethany Stephens, whose mother provides French lessons to the men in the area; Caroline Chong, a British Chinese girl; and Janice Connors, who is from an Irish Catholic family. Each of these girl's family homes are described with childlike innocence. The Stephens's basement flat is gloomy, smells of 'the 4711 cologne that Mrs Stephens was always dabbing at her temples' (p. 6) and Mrs Stephens's bedroom is partitioned off by a faded sheet. Mrs Stephens offers French lessons from home but she has no books and there are no pupils. This description of Bethany's seedy mother places her against the values of Mala's mother who objects to Mala visiting Bethany. By contrast, Caroline's

⁵¹ Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber, 1990)

parents, who work in a restaurant, are considered respectable, but seem separated from the lives of the girls. Caroline's older brother, Josh, is intimidating yet attractive. The Connors household is noisy, smells of nicotine and arguments fly about all the time. In order to escape from the restraints of their working class families, the four girls create their own world in the Bayswater neighbourhood between Craven Hill Gardens, Craven Terrace, Hallfield Estate and Westbourne Terrace. As the narrator says, 'It seemed to me that our mothers were forcing attention away from us and onto themselves' (p. 35). Perera's demarcation of the area suggests a very local experience which contrasts with the racism experienced by the people who attend the community meeting in the Tower Hamlets area in the East End.

While critics such as Procter, McLeod and Ball rightly claim that black and Asian British literature of the 1970s is located on the streets, Perera's retrospective portrait of London in the 1970s is different from those representations of London. The novel is set on the streets, but the streets in the Bayswater area are not riotous nor on fire. As with Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman*, the very act of being outside is important for the main character. Whether walking along Rotten Row, crossing the Serpentine, in Hyde Park, or running across Craven Road into Craven Terrace to meet Beth, or visiting her aunt Anu up the street on Queensway, these streets are a part of Mala's subjectivity. However, we also learn that these streets may be equally restraining for Mala and her friends. As Mala concedes, 'I couldn't be Grace Kelly because, I realised as I grew older, there were no princes in Paddington' (p. 15). The local, everyday experience of growing up in Bayswater is contrasted with the journey into central London with the older, more experienced Allie, who is into the flower power movement and with later trips to Trafalgar Square on New Year's Eve. These are, to echo Agnew, everyday experiences that invest these places with meaning and thus confront the dominant ideologies that have constructed spaces with authoritative meaning.

Perera's sense of belonging in London inflects the form of the novel as well. By contrast to Jelinek's argument that women's life writing is informed by 'irregularity rather than orderliness' and that such novels are often 'disconnected' and 'fragmentary', Perera's uses a linear narrative and pop cultural references to signal her belonging in London. The historical rift of diaspora that has separated black and Asian people from their histories elsewhere does not influence Perera's narration of selfhood. The dichotomy between Mala in Bayswater and Allie, who works in Carnaby Street, is significant. If indeed the mainstream culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by hippies, free love and flower power, Perera reminds us, once again, that there are other stories from that period. As the narrator says,

Other people grew up to a Beatles soundtrack – or the Monkees, depending on their level of sophistication. But we grew up to a cheap-sweet chant: 'Fruit-salads-black-jacks-sherbert-dabs-flying-saucers-chocolate-tools-love-hearts-parma-violets-TWIZZLERS' (p. 3).

The novel is interspersed with pop cultural references that serve to place the story historically. We hear of young men singing Long John Baldry's 'Let The Heartaches Begin', the #1 UK hit from 1967, while Allie is compared to the girl in the 1969 Peter Sarstedt hit, 'Where Do You Go To My Lovely', and sings The New Seekers' hit 'Never Ending Song of Love' from 1971. However, as the narrator, referring to the musical *Hair*, says, 'The Age of Aquarius had yet to dawn over Westbourne Terrace' (p. 49). As Mala reaches adolescence, the soundtrack of her life changes: Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young are considered old-fashioned while David Bowie, Pink Floyd and Marc Bolan provide the right amount of cool. Such pop cultural references suggest a different collective identity than that of inner-city 'Black Power'. Significantly, Perera asserts her subjectivity into the popular imagination of the 1960s and 1970s,

contributing to a wider and more accurate picture of the diversity of Britain during that period.

Considering Gilroy's call for attention to the intricate connections between the politics of race and the politics of location, Perera's novel offers a more optimistic vision of London as a constructive diaspora space where the protagonist negotiates her cultural identity as rooted in London. Transcending spaces and locations to which 'Black' British has often been relegated, her narrative is not oblivious to the dominant structures of power that continue to discriminate against her mother or the 'Black' population in the East End. As Thandi says, postwar South Asian migration to London often concentrated on Southall and Tower Hamlets because of its proximity to Heathrow airport and the garment manufacturing area. In other words, South Asian migrants are located by the demands of labour and capital, and ordered into certain areas of London. As tensions between the dominant white British and Britain's black population grew in the 1970s, clashes often occurred exactly in those areas where South Asians were based. In many ways, the Tower Hamlets area of London's East End became synonymous with South Asian migrants. However, Perera expands such urban geographies by narrating her subjectivity in relation to another area. As an aesthetic tactic, in de Certeau's words, she employs the form of life writing – incorporating a range of pop cultural references from the period – which, in turn, transforms British society. As a tactics of countering the dominant ideas of fixed borders and rooted belonging that order the city, Perera uses the form of life writing to assert her subjectivity into mainstream British history. Doing so, the novel itself constitutes its own contribution to the changing landscape of London.

Hanging Out in London Town: Atima Srivastava's Looking for Maya

What are the elements of this novel that derive from life writing? My analysis of *Looking for Maya* will demonstrate that Srivastava uses the form of life writing to explore a brief period of her life that influenced her sense of belonging in London. As a major characteristic of black and Asian British women's life writing from the 1990, the novel clearly embraces the inherent impossibility of capturing the self and resorts to experimenting with various ways of representing the self. The novel resembles traditional autobiography by adopting a linear and chronological structure, but Srivastava incorporates fiction and the subgenre *Künstlerroman* to explore and narrate her subjectivity. Moreover, Srivastava does not represent herself as fragmented and hybrid, but promotes a relational identity, which challenges the conventional masculine tradition of the coherent subject.

My examination of *Looking for Maya* will show that Srivastava narrates her subjectivity in relation to her two romantic love interests and as different from that of her parents. I will argue that the form of life writing provides an appropriate means for her to explore her Asian British cultural identity as an individual subjectivity. However, while she asserts her cultural identity as Asian in London, she does not engage with the issue of racism and the histories of colonialism and migration that brought her parents to Britain. As such, she does not inscribe her sense of selfhood into a collective history in South Asia. Moreover, Srivastava's novel is not dominated by irregularity and fragmentation but evolves chronologically as an assertion of belonging historically and spatially in London.

Whereas Perera's novel is set in the turbulent 1970s, which formed the basis for Gilroy's demand for attention to the intricate connections between the politics of race and the politics of location, Srivastava's *Looking for Maya* is set in the early 1990s. As such, it provides a more contemporary view of London after Thatcher and expands on our perspective of Asian British London. The novel revolves around Mira Chowdhary –

an aspiring author in her mid-twenties – who just graduated from university and is alone in London after she breaks up with her boyfriend, Luke, who is from the English countryside. In London she becomes infatuated with Amrit, a successful, intellectual Indian author and critic. Meanwhile she distances herself from her parents, Ravi Chowdhary and Kavita Joshi – or RaviKavi as they are referred to – who, after twenty years in Britain, moved back to India a few years before the novel begins. Addressing Gilroy's demand for attention to the intricate connections between the politics of race and the politics of location and Agnew's attention to the centrality of place and location in people's everyday lives, this section examines how Mira negotiates her sense of race, sense of place and cultural identity in relation to the people in her everyday life. Following on from Perera's novel, where the main character negotiated her cultural identity as different from her mother's, this section will first explore Mira's relationship to her parents before investigating her sense of location in relation to Luke and Amrit.

In terms of diaspora and the politics of location, RaviKavi's diaspora experience is different from Mira's. In their case, the experience of migration introduced a historical rift between location of belonging and location of residence. Their migration to London and return to India relates to Moore-Gilbert's vision of dislocated postcolonial migrant writing, where they seek a socio-spatial cultural identity in their homeland. For them, India is still home while for Mira the possibility of a return to India is not imaginable. This intergenerational conflict is rewarding to consider in more detail through the concept of diaspora.

Mira's parents were authors in India but left that life behind them when they migrated to England. In England – or rather in N3 near Archway in London – Mira's childhood home was not full of poetry that her parents had written, because they had given all of their books to friends – or The Visiting Gods, as Mira calls them – but

instead full of books they had brought to London from India. In fact, Mira does not even consider them to be authors anymore:

I didn't consider my parents and their dilapidated friends to be writers, although they were, many of them, great writers. They had all been published in their country, read and borrowed and quoted from each other. In England they had a pall of shabbiness and ordinary concerns which I couldn't fit into my idea of the writer's life (p. 147).

By contrast to Amrit, whose writing locates him in Britain, her parents' writing locates them in India. For them, in Mira's view, the act of writing does not challenge the dominant ideologies of power but perpetuates a tradition of Indian writing, distinct from Britain. Indeed, their literary careers are not imposed on Mira, but instead all of their other Indian values are what Mira rebels against. She places them against English cultural values:

English people never thought it quite correct to point out racial difference, thought it vulgar to assume that an Indian should be interested or even know another Indian in a big city. RaviKavi were obsessed with it, always nosing out connections, however tenuous, to mark their country and their long journey (p. 5).

Here, her parents are portrayed negatively. Similarly, she contrasts the way English people greet each other with her own parents: 'There were no excited howls of "hello" and "ahh" on the phone between them, as there were between me and my parents who drove me mad the way they treated every word, every contact from me as a national holiday' (pp. 7-8). In another episode which demonstrates Mira's tenuous Indian identity, she tries to use her Indianness to get into a disco, she is told that she is not Indian enough. The episode is indicative of the intergenerational gap between Mira and her parents. In England, her parents retain their Indianness by connecting with every Indian person they meet, but this does not apply to Mira's generation – she has lost her Indianness.

Conversely, her parents have not appropriated any English traditions – ‘RaviKavi had never made any concessions to England and so, unlike other Indians and Jews that I knew, we had never celebrated Christmas, not even for show’ (p. 92). Indeed, they have never been to a restaurant because they were the best cooks in the world anyway. Consequently, in her rebellion against them, as she reaches adulthood, she eats out almost ritually. Mira’s desire to extricate herself from her parents’ cultural identity was fulfilled when they moved back to India because her grandfather died. As she says: ‘how excited I had felt to be free of obligation and dependence’ (p. 56). Initially, then, Mira locates herself in Britain, as opposed to her parents, who she places in the cultural context of India.

However, after the break-up with Luke and her subsequent involvement with Amrit, Mira starts investigating her past and seeks to reconnect with her Indian heritage through her parents: ‘Home had always been the place where I had got back to myself, even when it was the place that I was forever plotting on leaving’ (p. 67). Here, Hall’s two notions of cultural identity usefully explain her desire to ground her subjectivity in a common, shared Indian identity, while at the same time extricating herself from her parents. When attending Luke’s mother’s birthday, Mira wears a shalwar kameez which, though over the top, makes her feel very feminine and Indian. As she says: ‘There was nothing stronger than the umbilical cord of the past, nothing more potent than the rope of familiarity, nothing as sure as home’ (p. 89). Mira’s attempt to reconnect with her past and her Indianness is also portrayed in her relation to food which, in her childhood made her ashamed of her parents because it smelled of garlic, but, as she says: ‘at some point after my parents had returned to their country, I started looking forward to that smell’ (p. 106). In an effort to embrace her roots, she starts cooking Indian food. Importantly, she contrasts her ability to cook food with Amrit’s English lover’s inability to do so. Srivastava’s self-reflective mirror is turned on herself

when she ponders the process of writing her past. She realises that her Indian heritage is important to her: 'I learnt how much I depended on those close to me, how theirs was the only approbation I sought. I realized that dependence is not always a hindrance. Sometimes it could be one's only support' (p. 207). For her parents, London does not constitute a part of their subjectivity nor do they engage with other people in the 'diaspora space' but retain a 'desire for a "homeland"'.⁵² This, however, does not mean that Mira detaches herself completely from their Indian cultural identity, but, by contrast to her parents, Mira locates herself decidedly in London when she is with Luke.

Srivastava's portrayal of their relationship is important here and relates to Brah's notion of a 'diaspora space'. Their relationship is indicative of her dissociation from her parents' collective Indian identity and her assertion of her individual identity in London. On the one hand, there is Luke, who is English, grew up in Brighton and calls his parents by their first names, Ralph and Matty. On the other, there is Mira, who was born in Lucknow, India, but grew up in London and has trouble calling her parents by their first names. On the surface, then, this hybrid constellation of 'IndianEnglish' seems out of place. Their differences are further exacerbated by their contrasting attitudes towards issues of race and ethnicity. Mira met Luke at the beginning of their final year at university – an unnamed university, located sixty miles from London – where she did a degree in History and took courses on Postcolonial Literature, studying the likes of Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul. Symbolically, Mira used the course notes for lining her underwear drawers. Her disinterest in the topic emphasises Mira's Britishness and sense of belonging in Britain, and is indicative of Srivastava's break with the canon of South Asian authors writing in English. At university, Mira and Luke are a couple that people notice; they complement each other: 'We were lithe and attractive, my dark skin against his pale skin, his hair blond, mine

⁵² Brah, p. 180.

dark. Our arms were always wrapped around each other making a creature which was IndianEnglish' (p. 3). Mira admits to stealing the hybrid term 'IndianEnglish' from an Indian cinema magazine, but Srivastava's use of it here also suggests the ease with which young people of Indian and English descent interact in the diaspora space. Thus, it contrasts with the term 'RaviKavi' – a contraction of her parents' Indian names.

Whereas Perera employed numerous pop cultural references of the 1960s and 1970s in order to assert her individual identity into the mainstream memory of that historical period, Srivastava's main character knows the ins and outs of London. Her familiarity with such locations indicates her sense of belonging in London. In the first scene of the novel, Mira and Luke are sipping espressos at Bar Italia in Soho. The narrator describes the setting in detail, displaying a familiarity with the right places to eat and drink. Mira's knowledge of London is posed against Luke: 'I'd told Luke all about the corners of London, full of different cultures, introduced him proudly to places that he had only heard about as he was growing up by the sea' (p. 1). In fact, this gap in Luke's knowledge was part of what brought them together in the first place: 'He didn't know about the Kings Road or the Marquee in Wardour Street or about jumping the trains without a ticket and I had gleefully filled in his gaps of knowledge' (p. 3). The two of them are photographed for a magazine featuring interesting Londoners. However, while both of them live in London at this point, Mira still considers Luke an outsider there: 'I giggled at the London words Luke had picked up' (16), and Luke gladly admits that, 'It's your town' (18), when Mira reluctantly agrees to go to Amrit's book launch. As the end of their relationship edges, Mira ponders Luke and her sense of belonging in London:

He'd grown up in Brighton, only seen London on day trips and then only the London of tourists. I had shown him the pockets of London that he had never imagined could be true. The little countries inside the capital. I'd taken him to Wembley full of aspiring Gujeratis in Mercs, to Green Lanes dotted with Cypriots

sitting in darkened rooms playing cards, Finsbury Park thrumming with Nigerian taxi drivers who said, 'I dhink I no you from somewhere, befour.' The Spanish tapas bar in Camden Town, the Jewish bagel bakery in Golders Green, the Irish Fish and Chips in The Free Republic of County Archway. 'How come we never cross the river?' Luke had asked. 'What river?' I'd said. There was only North London and Soho. All the rest, the West and the East and the South was all propaganda (p. 19).

In this case, Mira is a native informant – someone who provides detailed and authoritative insight into a community unknown to Luke.⁵³ In ethnography, the native informant is often associated with notions of exoticism and exploration. However, Mira does not give an ethnographical description of Asians in London but describes London as a culturally diverse space that she knows and has access to, vesting the city with new meaning in the process, as Agnew argued. Doing so, Srivastava lets her protagonist transcend divisions within London, emphasising the hybrid nature of the city and destabilising the category 'Asian British' as confined to certain areas. In this sense, the novel does not easily fit the definition of autoethnography, in which the author represents the lives of Asians in London. By contrast, her individual account serves to challenge dominant notions of space and location, and to deconstruct the homology between race and nation.

The narrator's individual subjectivity manifests itself further in relation to Luke. As summer approaches, the couple debates where to go on holiday. Luke wants to go to India to meet Mira's parents but Mira refuses: 'No way I'm leaving London this summer, what there's left of it. I want to be here. It's the first time in my life I can be alone and hanging out in London Town. I used to dream about being here by myself in the summer' (p. 35). Mira's refusal to go to India with Luke marks not only her budding independence from him, but also the assertion of herself in London. The

⁵³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (London; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 6.

exclamation serves two purposes then: first, Mira separates herself from Luke and, second, Mira locates herself in London.

Throughout the novel, Srivastava does not engage with the issue of racism. Although this is partly due to the historical period she portrays, in avoiding this she escapes the burden of representation and does not embrace a collective Asian British identity. In fact, she eschews the notion that she should, indeed, have an intricate knowledge of Indian culture altogether. While neither Mira nor anybody in her family 'had a single musical bone in [their] bodies' (p. 18), Luke is researching the influence of the East on the musical tradition of the West. His interest in Eastern music started long before they met, but it still makes Mira wonder if he is only interested in her because of her Indian heritage. When Luke wins a British Academy grant to go to Delhi to conduct an anthropological study of Indian music, they decide to break up. Mira has preconceived notions of how Luke will experience India and the Indian people but, in the end, she has to admit that it is her preconceptions of Luke that must be adjusted. Because, while Luke goes to India and experiences it as a tourist, Mira confesses that she hardly knows India herself, rendering her critique of his interest in India misplaced. This novelistic manoeuvre is significant here, because it allows Luke, in this case the supposed outsider, to become familiar with an aspect of India that Mira, the supposed insider, is not familiar with. Conversely, Srivastava lets Mira be the insider in London. Her relationship with Luke is, then, also an assertion of her subjectivity in London. However, in the wake of the break-up, Mira starts to feel displaced:

Suddenly, with my empty days stretching ahead of me, freedom threatened to turn into void It was as though my previous skin was lying in tatters around me, still attached, while this new skin that I had been so looking forward to, hadn't formed yet. It was still raw and fragile (p. 57).

Relating to Hall's notion of cultural identity as a production – always in process – in this example, Srivastava reminds us that identity is not a fixed and stable entity that can be placed according to a specific location. Srivastava alludes to this fluidity of subjectivity with her title, *Looking for Maya*, Maya being a Hindi word meaning 'Illusion'. Mira's relationship with Luke has served to place her in London, then, and whereas this is a significant part of Srivastava's project of locating herself in London through her main character, Mira spends the rest of the novel exploring her subjectivity in relation to other locations. If Mira's relationship to Luke located her in London, her relationship with Amrit serves to complicate the Asian British experience.

Brah's distinction between a 'homing desire' and 'desire for a "homeland"' is instructive for examining Mira's relationship with Amrit. For Mira, Amrit establishes a link to India while at the same time retaining his British identity, creating an Asian British cultural identity. This aspect can be fruitfully explored in relation to the form of life writing, considering the intricate connections between the formation of subjectivity, the tactics of writing the city and the politics of belonging in London.

To a certain extent, the novel details Srivastava's own process of becoming an author and it thus resembles a *Künstlerroman*, a literary genre where the author narrates her artistic growth.⁵⁴ However, the narration of her own artistic growth also allows Srivastava to impose linearity and coherence on her sense of selfhood. In this regard, I interpret this element of the novel more as a tactical act of self-representation into historical time. Drifting further and further away from Luke, Mira becomes infatuated with Amrit, an academic and author in his mid-forties. Mira meets Amrit through Luke's father, Ralph, who casually says, 'You must talk to Amrit He's a writer too' (p. 8). The remark serves two purposes here: first, establishing a bond between Mira and Amrit and, second, in narrating Mira as an author, drawing attention to the

⁵⁴ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (London: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), p. 201.

autobiographical aspect of the novel. Upon meeting Amrit, Mira is annoyed with Luke and Ralph for not pointing out that Amrit is Indian like her. The remark, then, serves to link Amrit and Mira not by their Indianness but by the fact that they are both authors. This, in turn, seems only to draw Mira closer to Amrit, because Mira is equally drawn to Amrit's Indian background. Second, we learn that shortly before they met, Mira had won a short-story competition, an event that mirrors Srivastava's own life. The event marks the beginning of their relationship where Mira oscillates between identifying herself as English as well as Indian. Indeed with Amrit, in contrast with Luke, Mira questions her sense of belonging in London.

Upon first meeting Amrit, Mira is struck by his looks that, to her, are not typically Indian: 'For a moment I wasn't sure that he was Indian, because his skin was so fair, the colour of pale golden tobacco and his eyes were more than brown. I didn't know Indians could have grey eyes' (p. 6). From the outset, Amrit dismantles every preconception Mira has of Indian people: 'His accent was Indian, but not like any Indian accent I had ever heard. It was Indian but it was posh, there was no confusion of W's pronounced as V's, a distinction that my father after spending twenty years in England still couldn't discern' (pp. 6-7). In emphasising Amrit's differences here, Srivastava deftly deconstructs the notion of a homogeneous Indian or South Asian identity based on looks or accent, yet we also find Mira recognising a number of characteristics that, to her, are distinctly Indian.

As a way of explaining Mira's inclination for writing, Ralph proudly informs Amrit, that Mira's parents are both poets. This information makes Amrit inquire about their names which makes Mira smile: 'It was such an Indian question. English people asked your name out of politeness and necessity, but for an Indian your surname signified everything they needed to know about where you came from' (p. 8). Although Amrit has not heard of Mira's parents, he still nods in acknowledgment of what it

means to have authors for parents. Whereas Mira is at first struck by Amrit's difference from all other Indian people she knows, she is equally drawn to him for his familiarity with and knowledge of India. As she says: 'He knew Lucknow, how civilized the people were in that small town where my parents had grown up speaking that gorgeous language referred to as Hindustani, the mix of Hindi and Urdu reminiscent of the Nawabs of Oudh' (p. 9). Amrit includes Mira in the Kayastas the fifth caste – the authors' caste – and calls them 'side-ys' (p. 9), which is Bollywood slang for hooligans. Amrit's knowledge of these things makes Mira feel 'an odd kinship' (p. 9) with him:

He didn't have intimate knowledge of the world of Hindi literature but he knew how I had learnt my language, from the privileged position of the daughter of poets amongst traders and clerks and bank managers. He knew in the way, I realized with a sudden shock, Luke or Ralph would never know (pp. 9-10).

Mira's relationship with Amrit is, thus, also defined by its difference from her relationship with Luke. Part of what kept her and Luke together were their differences, but what attracts her to Amrit is their similarities. For Mira, Amrit embodies the homing desire – the notion of roots in Britain – while not completely abandoning his Indian identity.

Yet, Mira soon realises that, while Amrit may have pinned her down, she does not know him. Indeed, Amrit's mystique and knowledge is so different from Luke's view of the world. Whereas with Luke, Mira had been the insider who would know all the exciting places in London, with Amrit, it is he who has the knowledge of London. Consequently, Mira's place in London changes when she is with Amrit. She and Luke were invited to the launch of Amrit's latest book entitled *The Journey of One of Many* which is to be held in an Indian restaurant: 'Amrit's book launch wasn't going to be an Indian event, even though I noticed it was in an Indian restaurant I'd never heard of, somewhere upmarket' (p. 24). As soon as she arrives, she looks 'out of place' (p. 25)

and leaves shortly thereafter only to be caught by Amrit, who has also left the launch. He drags her into a pub, where he meets some friends, two old Indian men, who 'didn't look very sophisticated, they were jowly and dressed in shabby tweed jackets' (p. 27). Significantly, Mira does not know the place: 'We entered a small pub in Romilly Street. It must have been the only pub in London that summer which wasn't crowded and heaving' (p. 27). Instead, it is Amrit who introduces the pub as 'The Despair', whereas it is actually called 'The Hope'. In contrast with Luke, Amrit is the insider, who introduces places in London to Mira. Indeed, when Mira is with Amrit, she is displaced and starts questioning her identity.

From then on, her relationship with Amrit evolves on three levels that signal the intricate connections between the formation of subjectivity and the form of life writing: first, Mira is attracted to him because of his difference from Luke; second, she is attracted to him because of his intelligence and abilities as an author and, third, although he is familiar with her Indian background, he is different from her parents. It is in relation to Amrit that Mira develops as an author. Faced with the question of what she is writing these days, Mira says, 'I think I'd like to write a novel. About where I was born and all the people there, the families I used to know. My memories of childhood' (p. 28). Amrit mockingly retorts, 'Mangoes and coconuts and grandmothers The Great Immigrant novel' (p. 28). The remark is striking because it points to the change in post-war black and Asian British writing. Whereas the earlier generation authors like Attia Hosain were concerned with the past and childhood in colonial India, this generation is concerned with the here and now of Asians in Britain.⁵⁵ As Mira obtains an agent, Torquil, she is assured that 'Asian writing [is] in vogue these days' (p. 68). This change in the publishing industry, however, is scorned by Amrit, who says

⁵⁵ Nasta, p. 45. See also, Bruce King, *The Oxford English Literary History: The Internationalization of English Literature, Vol. 3, 1948-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 35: 'Like most of the Indian writers who lived in England [Attia Hosain's] subject matter remained India'.

that, 'these days victimhood was in vogue, either it was black or female or working class That literature was being written by barbarians, it had become a cheap and shameless public relations racket' (p. 46). Although Srivastava reminds us of the external circumstances that influence literature here, she is determined to explore her subjectivity in writing. The episode signals a particular moment in black and Asian British literature which Srivastava consciously distances herself from.

For Mira, writing is about seizing the moment and pushing everything else into the background:

All the tasks of ordinary existence became a backdrop to my work. Memories I thought I had forgotten or deemed irrelevant, came back to me vividly, suddenly precious gems of my life. I felt myself in a kind of trance, as though I was seeing a movie in my head and writing down what I saw, as quickly as I could (p. 63).

As it turns out, she actually writes the typical Great Immigrant Novel which indicates her detachment from external circumstances like Amrit's advice:

I smiled wryly when I found myself writing about the first Alphonso mangoes in Crawford Market; cool green coconuts cracked open by men with sharp knives; my grandmother falling asleep in the cinema hall and insisting she hadn't lost the plot. The Great Immigrant novel, Amrit mocked (p. 64).

While these issues may indeed be typical for Indian writing, it is also Srivastava reminding us that these issues are important for her identity, without perpetuating clichés about this experience. This approach underscores the intricate connections between life writing, the formation of subjectivity and the role of location: in the novel, the protagonist sets her novel in the past in India, but *Looking for Maya* is Srivastava's assertion of herself in Britain. The novel, thus, is Srivastava's response to those critics who expect another stereotypical novel about immigrants in Britain. The autobiographical self fragments as the author invests herself in the creative formation of

identity. As the narrator says, 'I felt I was in the middle of some elaborate task of creation, piecing together all the hundreds of fragments of a vast jigsaw' (p. 64).

Srivastava alludes to the creative potential of autobiographical writing, where the author can remember and recreate her identity through writing. She forms her identity from her past as well as her future. For the narrator, too, the past is just as significant as the present: 'I was eager to return to my work, eager to consolidate my beginnings, my past pictures, as though they would over-expose, turn white in the darkroom of memory if I tarried too long in the present' (p. 66). For all the external circumstances – the vagaries of the publishing industry and the advice of a seasoned academic – Srivastava reminds us that the creative process must necessarily be an inventory of internal and personal memories.

In the process of writing her first novel, Mira extricates herself from Amrit. However, in the immediate aftermath of finishing the novel, they meet and have sex. For Amrit, Mira is so different from all the white girls he has been involved with over the years, and she reminds him of his first wife, Maya, who Srivastava also alludes to in the title. Initially they become involved romantically, but Mira also feels Amrit's detachment from her. After they separate, Mira discovers she is pregnant and decides to have an abortion. As will be explored further in Chapter 3, this is indicative of female agency and the right to choose, as well as a sign of the historical period of the novel. Instead of having a child, Mira focuses on her writing career, which she compares to having a child:

You should be enjoying this, savouring every minute, it'll never happen again, I told myself; this is what you've been waiting for. In remembered the sharp pain in my back all those months ago, as I had marvelled at my body, exhausted after sitting hunched over the computer; remembered it now in a sepia haze, the sweet pain of effort. And now the book was going to be born, sit in its newly-printed skin, fat upon bookshelves (p. 175).

At her book launch, which, in contrast with Amrit's, is marked by its Indian food and aunties and parents from India, Mira contemplates:

As I sat huddled and alone in the middle of Soho square, suddenly I knew that I had things in my life that previously I had scorned A great rush of emotion came over me. I realized I had a past. I wasn't just alive. I had lived. I had seen things. I was connected to people. The journey had only just begun (p. 211).

It is this connection to the past which is significant in Mira's relationship with her parents. In relation to Luke, Mira locates herself decidedly in London but with Amrit, she starts interrogating her identity as Asian and British. However, she finds that Amrit does not embrace his Asian past; he is rational and does not understand Mira when she says: 'We need to believe. Even when we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that what we believe in is an illusion' (p. 218). This wisdom has been passed on from her mother: 'There are always two sides to a story my mum had said' (p. 219). This insight towards the end of the novel is emblematic of Mira's relationship with her parents, against whom she defines herself initially.

In the course of the novel, Mira's sense of location and belonging in London goes through three stages: in relation to Luke, she asserts herself decidedly as a Londoner who is comfortably at home in the diaspora space. However, this assertion of her subjectivity in London is thrown into question, when she drifts into the orbit of Amrit. In her attempt to understand him, she variably places herself as English, so she can understand his Englishness, as Indian, so she knows where he comes from, and as an author, so she can understand the process of writing. However, it is her mother's mantra that there are always more sides to a story that liberates her from Amrit's dogmatic understanding of life. In order to explore the many parts that make up her cultural identity, Srivastava lets her main character take up writing the history of her family in

India. By contrast, Srivastava's novel is set purely in the present. This double approach allows Srivastava to explore her cultural identity:

I, meanwhile, had been the product of a multi-cultural education, where mothers from council estates regularly complained to the school because their child knew more about Diwali than Christmas. And at home, India had continued as surely as it had in Delhi and Bombay: Hindi was spoken, food cooked, values drilled, connections given, histories recounted, gods entertained (p. 142).

In *Looking for Maya*, Srivastava complicates her location by exploring histories and trajectories to her parental homeland. Ultimately, Srivastava narrates a culturally diverse London as a diaspora space where contemporary Asian Britons belong more than they belong in South Asia. Despite her Asian British cultural identity, she has access to London at all levels and narrates herself as the insider.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, in their concern with the issue of location, these two novels represent one of the key characteristics of black and Asian British women's life writing. In both novels, the issue of location inflects the authors' subjectivity which is represented as relational and individual. As a consequence, I have argued, both novelists adopt a linear and chronological narrative structure that reflects their sense of belonging in London. I have shown that, through the use of life writing, Perera's and Srivastava's autobiographical novels represent London as a diaspora space, where Asian British girls and young women are not confined to the domestic sphere as mothers and wives. In contrast with black and Asian British novels from the 1970s, the main characters of these two Asian British novels are outside – but not on the streets of London's East End. In this respect, they differ from the earlier generation of authors and challenge critical assumptions about the urban location of Asian British literature. While both Srivastava and Perera draw on their personal experiences to locate

themselves in London, they provide two different representations of Asian British London. Issues of racism and sexism were still relevant in Britain in the 1990s and are, indeed, still today. However, in each their own way, Perera and Srivastava demonstrate that Asian British women's writing is concerned with issues of race, ethnicity and cultural diversity without resorting to essentialist notions of the 'Black' or 'Asian' British subject. As such, they expand on existing critical engagement with Asian British writing about London.

My examination of these two novels as examples of life writing, moreover, demonstrates how the genre is used to interrogate and represent the self in fiction. In both of these two novels, the authors use life writing to challenge the ways in which Asian British women have traditionally been represented by dominant discourses of race, gender and cultural identity. In the hand of these two authors, life writing is an especially useful tool to respond to the particular historical context and the experiences that have shaped their life. In *Looking for Maya*, for instance, Srivastava confronts the ways in which Asian British women have often been restricted to certain locations in London by allowing her main character to explore the city as an insider. At the same time, however, Srivastava rarely engages in the collective politics of racism and sexism against Asian women in Britain, thus defying the convention of telling her story on behalf of the community. Similarly, Perera displays a familiarity with the ways in which her mother, for instance, is subject to racism and certain gender expectations. Perera uses the form of life writing to negotiate her own sense of self and escape the burden of representation, as Mercer says.

Numerous black and Asian British women's novels from the 1990s deal with the intergenerational difference in the experience of location. For Andrea Levy and Jenny McLeod, for instance, the issue of location – and London in particular – is also evident in their novels. However, whereas the historical rift of diaspora usefully accounts for

Srivastava's and Perera's sense of belonging in London, there has also been a preoccupation with the histories of slavery, colonialism and migration that connect these locations. This diasporic re-imagination of histories elsewhere deconstructs the notion of fixed borders and narratives and brings other stories into light. However, to what extent are such collective narratives naturally passed on from one generation to the next? How can collective traumatic events be re-imagined? And, how do such collective histories impact on the formation of the individual subjectivity? My next chapter explores such questions and considers them in relation to life writing.

**CHAPTER 2 – WRITING TRAUMA: LIFE WRITING AND THE POLITICS OF
REMEMBERING IN ANDREA LEVY’S *FRUIT OF THE LEMON* (1999) AND
JENNY MCLEOD’S *STUCK UP A TREE* (1998)**

This chapter examines the notion and representation of trauma, an issue of frequent concern in contemporary black and Asian British literature. It is explored specifically here through a reading of Andrea Levy’s *Fruit of the Lemon* and Jenny McLeod’s *Stuck Up a Tree*, which both bear witness to the forgetting and remembering of cultural and collective traumatic events and experiences. The dominant regimes of representation that positioned and subjected black people as ‘others’ within the categories of the West continue to haunt certain aspects of the postcolonial era in the form of modern racism. In a different but related context, in the attempt to start a new life in Britain, postwar migration was frequently accompanied by a desire to forget the collective histories of slavery and colonial subordination. In this chapter, I argue that these two authors use the form of life writing to assert their individual identities into the collective histories of the past. As such, these novels promote subjectivities that are neither ‘purely individualistic’ nor ‘purely collective’.¹ What emerges, indeed, are hybrid identities that straddle various historical narratives. Moreover, I will demonstrate how these two novelists use non-linear and non-chronological narrative strategies that capture their fragmented sense of history. In other words, these two novels are ‘irregular’ and ‘disconnected’.²

In the face of continual racism and without collective traumatic histories that form part of the black colonial experience passed on from her parents, Levy’s main character struggles to establish her cultural identity in contemporary Britain and subsequently experience a crisis of identity. In other and less obvious ways, McLeod’s protagonist

¹ Friedman, p. 40.

² Jelinek, p. 17.

experiences the hidden racist ideologies of dominant British history and she self-consciously represses memories of her childhood, leading to a crisis of identity following her mother's death. This chapter examines these novels as forms of life writing, and sets out to investigate the interface between the formation of subjectivity and the politics of remembering collective traumatic events in literature. I ask such pertinent questions as: how do these novelists explore and narrate traumatic events and histories? In what ways do those histories inform their cultural identities? And, how do these authors use the form of life writing to engage with those traumatic histories? I argue that, on one level, in both of these novels, the memories of traumatic events are not passed on from the parents' generation but, in other ways, these histories are explored and passed on by Levy and McLeod through literature. In this way, these two novels act as interventions in history that serve to tell – not the other story – but part of the whole story of Britain.

These inquiries are fired by Paul Gilroy's challenge that 'histories of suffering should not be allocated exclusively to their victims. If they were, the memory of trauma would disappear as the living memory of it died away'.³ His claim relates to the way collective histories of traumatic events should not be relegated to histories elsewhere but must be recognised within the shared history of Britain. Moreover, it begs a consideration of the way traumatic histories are explored in contemporary black British literature. Elsewhere, Gilroy argues that the telling and retelling of stories of loss, exile and migration serve as nodal points in the social memory of black people. The continual narration of traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism and migration, he argues, serve to 'invent, maintain and renew identity'.⁴ Such remembering, argues Homi Bhabha, 'is

³ Gilroy, *Between Camps*, p. 114.

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 198.

never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the present'.⁵

In order to establish a critical framework for analysing these two novels, I will first explore the concept of trauma and its historical context, before investigating how these two black British female authors have explored and narrated traumatic collective events and experiences. My approach takes a number of directions which I will now set out. I will first examine how issues of repression, working through and belatedness have served to advance certain traumatic experiences as paradigmatic at the expense of other traumatic events. In the last twenty years – drawing predominantly on Freudian psychoanalysis – a literary-critical fascination with the unspeakable nature of trauma and its belated effects has developed through a focus on events such as the Holocaust and the Vietnam War.⁶ Second, Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory' will illustrate the centrality of passing on memories from one generation to the next in the formation of cultural identity.⁷ Third, in order to consider traumatic experiences outside the Euro-American context, I will then briefly discuss how the traumatic events of slavery and colonialism have been dealt with by cultural and postcolonial critics such as Paul Gilroy, Michael Rothberg and Sam Durrant.⁸ Fourth, the work of Leigh Gilmore and Suzette Henke will provide useful models for investigating the intricate connections between trauma and life writing, suggesting that the form of life writing offers the traumatised subject a way of working through traumatic experiences.⁹

⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 90.

⁶ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 15.

⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997)

⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004)

⁹ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2001); Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

Following on from Chapter 1, the concept of diaspora also offers a valuable theoretical model for examining the notion of trauma in contemporary black British women's writing. As Paul Gilroy has argued in *The Black Atlantic*, the notion of diaspora is a historical condition already experienced by blacks and Asians in the British Empire, but the concept takes on new meaning in the postcolonial era.¹⁰ If we consider postwar migration to Britain – symbolised by the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* – as a rupture in time, Stuart Hall offers two useful ways of considering 'cultural identity' in the diaspora: first, as one shared, collective idea of culture, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. This insight provides an understanding of the power of establishing coherence on the traumatic experience of dispersal and fragmentation. Second, he considers cultural identity as individual subjectivity that is produced, always in process and which belongs to the future as much as to the past.¹¹ This position relates to the need for remembering and re-telling the narratives of the past as something that is produced in the present.

These debates form the intellectual framework for examining Levy's and McLeod's texts as trauma narratives that incorporate autobiographical elements. Before moving into critical textual analysis of the two texts, a comparative and contrastive discussion of the role of trauma in contemporary black and Asian British writing will serve as literary context.

Introducing Trauma: Postmemory and Working Through

In this section, I will briefly discuss the notion of trauma and demonstrate which theoretical models for understanding traumatic events are useful for my analysis. In both novels, the two main characters' parents have migrated to Britain in the immediate postwar years. They carried with them the memories of collective experiences of

¹⁰ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 199.

¹¹ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', pp. 222, 224.

slavery and colonialism, but repressed those memories in search of a better break in Britain. In this sense, the Windrush migration constitutes a historical rift in the collective memory of black people in the diaspora, a rift in which the traumatic experiences of slavery and colonialism cannot be fully represented. My understanding of trauma is informed psychological inquiries into the mind. Since the late nineteenth century, the term trauma has taken on an increasingly psychological meaning to describe a wound to the mind instead of the body. In this chapter, the term trauma is used in its colloquial sense, meaning an experience, or series of experiences, that alter the state of mind of the victim and cause a crisis of identity.

For J. M. Charcot, Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, trauma was understood as an experience that shatters the victim's capacity to cognitively comprehend what happened – indeed, the traumatic event is repressed and the victim is unable to represent it. This understanding of trauma relates both to the ways in which migrants have tended to repress memories of slavery and colonialism and the inability for their descendants to come to terms with those wider collective histories. As will be evident in my analysis of the two novels, this repression leads to an identity crisis within the victims. In order to treat the disorder, Charcot applied hypnosis, while Breuer developed his 'talking cure' and Freud developed Charcot's and Breuer's procedures into his own psychoanalytical procedure where the patient would work through the traumatic event through interpretation and free association. This is referred to as *mimesis*, where the patient through words mimics and works through the traumatic event with the help of the psychoanalyst.¹² This understanding of trauma – and the possibility of working through

¹² For more on Charcot and traumatic hysteria, see Mark S. Micale, 'Charcot and *le névroses traumatiques*: Scientific and Historical Reflections', *Revue Neurologique*, 150 (1994), pp. 498-505. For Breuer's and Freud's psychoanalytical models, see Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, translated under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud, Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. [with a Portrait.], Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 2. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), and Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology, and Other Works*; Translated under the General Editorship of James Strachey in Collaboration with Anna Freud, Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 18. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 12-23.

trauma through speech – is relevant for exploring trauma in literature. Another characteristic of traumatic experience, Freud argues, is the belated reliving of the experience in flashbacks. In this sense, trauma is both the initial blow to the mind and the conscious reliving of the experience later. In addition to this, I note that the very recognition and becoming aware of trauma is essential to the conscious reliving and representation of the experience later. This is central to my analysis of McLeod's novel.

However, this model of *mimesis* also has its limitations. In *Stuck Up a Tree*, McLeod intentionally plays on the notion of truthfully representing traumatic memories of her childhood. From early on, these psychological inquiries into the nature of trauma were contested and today the field remains divided by many disagreements.¹³ Charcot's, Breuer's and Freud's respective understandings of trauma were criticised by Hippolyte Bernheim and later Joseph Babinski, one of Charcot's students, for their mimetic-suggestive theory, which denies the individual's subjectivity and emphasises the role of the psychoanalyst in bringing repressed memories to light.¹⁴ At the heart of this *anti-mimesis* stance is the question of false memory which has haunted trauma studies until present day. The notion of *anti-mimesis* is useful in my analysis of McLeod's novel. Moreover, while the early clinical work of Freud and others has remained influential it has left some questions unexamined. For the purposes of this analysis, these are, first, how do we consider collective traumatic events and, second, to what extent can such models be applied in the context of non-European experiences of trauma. In the balance of this introduction to trauma, I will first briefly discuss how we can conceive of trauma as a collective wound in history. This discussion relates to my query into collective and individual identities.

¹³ For a detailed overview of the field of trauma studies, see Leys, *Trauma*.

¹⁴ Hippolyte Bernheim, *New Studies in Hypnotism* (New York: International Universities Press, 1980 [1890]); Joseph Francois Felix Babinski, and Jules Froment, *Hysteria or Pithiatism, and Reflex Nervous Disorders in the Neurology of War* (London: University of London Press, 1918). In response to Charcot's conception of traumatic hysteria, Babinski coins the term 'pithiatism'.

In the 1990s, a new literary-critical fascination with the unspeakable nature of trauma occurred – particularly within United States-based academia – which developed into the critical field known as trauma studies. While Freud focused primarily on personal mental disorders, modern trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth have given considerable attention to the long-term impact of collectively experienced traumas such as the Holocaust.¹⁵ Within trauma studies, the Holocaust has occupied a prominent place, prompting Andreas Huyssen to call it a ‘master signifier’ of the ‘culture of memory’, and trauma critics Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman to argue that it represents ‘the watershed of our times’ the unspeakability of which has led to a ‘*radical historical crisis in witnessing*’.¹⁶ Yet, despite this supposed crisis in witnessing, Laub and Felman stress the importance of language for experiencing, recognising and understanding trauma. This is echoed by Caruth, who argues that the processes of speaking and listening are essential for understanding the ‘inherent belatedness’ of trauma.¹⁷ Drawing on Freud, Caruth claims that it is only through this belatedness that trauma is experienced in the first place. In relation to the Jewish history of displacement and the Holocaust, Caruth argues that, since the sheer scale and terror of the Holocaust has led to a crisis in witnessing, ‘it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time’.¹⁸ This insight is illuminating for understanding the belatedness of traumatic experiences in contemporary black British trauma narratives. It illustrates how

¹⁵ See the special issues of *American Imago*, 48, 1-2 (1991), edited by Cathy Caruth; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

¹⁶ Andreas Huyssen, ‘Trauma and Memory: A New Imaginary of Temporality’, in *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, ed. by Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 16-29 (p. 16); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992), pp. xiv, 201. Italics in original.

¹⁷ Caruth, ‘Introduction’, 1-12 (p. 10).

¹⁸ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 17.

the collective traumatic experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration can actually only be imagined from a historical distance.

This sense of belated reliving and re-imagining of collective traumatic events and their importance in the formation of collective histories is crucial for my analysis of these two novels and warrants further exploration here. Caruth's notion of belatedness has been developed further by Marianne Hirsch, whose concept of postmemory is instructive. Conceived with particular reference to the Holocaust and focusing on photography as a medium, she argues that

postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their own birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated.¹⁹

Postmemory is, in her view, 'distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection'.²⁰ However, Hirsch's concept presumes both a linear progression of history and a generational difference between those who experienced the Holocaust and the children of those who survived. In order to resist the possibility of historical extinction, the retelling of stories of the traumatic nature of the Holocaust is essential for establishing a modern, post-Holocaust collective identity for Jewish people. According to Hirsch, these stories can be passed on from one generation to the next through photography and other forms of media. Moreover, as Hirsch argues further, 'I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences'.²¹ The concept of postmemory is instructive in combination with Gilroy's concern that the telling and retelling of stories of collective traumatic experiences are essential for cultural identity. However, in my

¹⁹ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

analysis of the two novels, I will demonstrate that the notion of postmemory is limited unless accompanied by attention to the particular history of postwar migration to Britain. While the disproportionate focus on the Holocaust has led to an imbalance in trauma studies, it has also generated a critical vocabulary that is useful for exploring other collective traumas such as slavery, colonialism and migration.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is productive to initiate a dialogue between the critical vocabulary and theoretical models developed from trauma critics and the intellectual project of postcolonialism. The centrality of trauma to the understanding and overcoming of slavery and colonialism has long been noted by influential thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said.²² More recently, Leela Gandhi has argued that 'postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past'.²³ If we follow Gandhi's understanding, critics take on the role of the psychoanalyst, in Freudian terms. But, as I will suggest throughout this chapter, the project of remembering the colonial past is not merely an academic task. As I will demonstrate in my analysis of *Fruit of the Lemon*, it is, equally a task for novelists to remember and interrogate the past.

In similar terms to Gandhi, in *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy acknowledges the work of Fanon but still asks why critics have been reluctant about initiating a correspondence between the histories of black and Jews. Taking up the challenge in that study, Gilroy argues that within black cultural production – and here Gilroy refers

²² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2007 [1952]); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon engages in a critical conversation with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 194), making valuable comparisons between the history of the Jews and the history of black people. His anti-colonial manifesto, however, is invested in the specific historical context of liberation struggles in the Caribbean and Africa. It evokes the traumatic experiences of slavery and colonialism in order to unite black people in their struggles for independence. As such, there is a specific strategic purpose to Fanon's inquiry. In *Orientalism* (1978), widely considered the founding text of postcolonial studies, Edward Said discusses the discourses shaping imperialism and observes that 'anti-Semitism and ... Orientalism resemble each other very closely', pp 27-8.

²³ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 4.

particularly to Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987), but also to the work of C. L. R. James and W. E. B. Du Bois – the desire to return to the traumatic history of slavery and explore it imaginatively offers 'a means to restage confrontations between rational, scientific and enlightened Euro-American thought and the supposedly primitive outlook of prehistorical, cultureless and bestial African slaves'.²⁴ His argument relates to the notion of 'autoethnography' which allows authors from a marginalised community to represent themselves collectively. However, while such restaging is crucial in the struggle for access to representation, it must be accompanied by an attention to the very differences that make up the black colonial experience. Despite Gilroy's contention, postcolonial scholars have – to date – engaged little with the critical insights from trauma studies.

How do the traumatic histories of the Holocaust and those of slavery and colonialism engage in intellectually useful conversation without resorting to a hierarchical and competitive ideology? Michael Rothberg proposes that 'we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative'.²⁵ In this sense, memory is conceived as a discursive space where cultural identities are formed in dialogical interactions with others – not silencing histories, but displacing them. This relates to Brah's notion of diaspora space. Looking beyond the historical period of decolonisation, this chapter brings Rothberg's insights into the realm of contemporary black British literature and considers it in conjunction with life writing.

My analysis also draws on Sam Durrant's recent work.²⁶ While his study does not engage with trauma in the black British context, it provides a useful model for

²⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 220.

²⁵ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 3.

²⁶ Aside from Durrant, see also Mairi Neeves, 'The Negotiation of Trauma in Postcolonial Culture' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2009); Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy's edited collection, *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Vijay Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2007) and the special issue of *Studies in the Novel*, 40 (2008), edited by Stef Craps and Gert Buelens.

considering the memorialisation of collective traumatic experiences such as slavery and colonialism. Building on Gilroy's argument in *The Black Atlantic*, Durrant argues that postcolonial trauma narratives are caught between two commitments: on the one hand, the recovery of the individual subject, where mourning is a process of attaining closure, and, on the other hand, the remembering of collective traumatic experiences that foster a sense of cultural identity.²⁷ Although Durrant's study is 'deliberately anti-autobiographical', his understanding of postcolonial trauma narratives is valuable for thinking about the performative functions of the autobiographical novel.²⁸ His argument that 'postcolonial narrative enables us to work through our *relation* to history; it is not a communal act so much as an act of creating community' captures the project of black British trauma narratives as well. But this chapter extends his argument and explores the possibilities of working through trauma through life writing. This examination is carried out in two ways: first, by examining the intricate connections between trauma and life writing and, second, reading black British trauma narratives through the concept of diaspora.

In my analysis of the two novels, I am particularly interested in the ways in which these two authors use life writing to engage with the collective experiences of trauma. In its focus on identity formation and re-imagination, the form of life writing converges with many concerns in trauma studies. In relation to the notion of *mimesis*, life writing offers a means for the author to confront repressed memories and re-imagine them in narrative form. But if those memories are not experienced directly – as in the case of the collective memories of slavery, colonialism and migration – then how can they be re-imagined autobiographically in novels? Leigh Gilmore suggests that, 'part of what we must call healing lies in the assertion of creativity'.²⁹ Less concerned with objective truth, the use of autobiographical elements in fictions offers the traumatised

²⁷ Durrant, p. 9.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁹ Gilmore, p. 24.

subject a mode for coming to terms with her traumatic experiences. In this sense, the writing of the novel itself becomes the repetition of the traumatic event, and it is through the novel that the trauma is relived, re-imagined and experienced. In similar terms, Suzette Henke argues that the form of life writing can so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis that that it provides a therapeutic alternative – she calls this ‘scriptotherapy’.³⁰ The very creativity of the form of life writing enables the author to instantiate her subjectivity and confront the silences of the dominant culture and to ‘assume an empowered position of political agency in the world’. This theoretical model provides a helpful way of understanding not only how trauma can be mediated – as a creative and performative act – but also how the form of life writing can potentially help the traumatised subject. In this brief outline, I have attempted to map a framework for dealing with trauma in literature in general. However, while I have drawn here on theories related to the Holocaust and postcolonialism, in the next section I will attempt to bring these models into conversation with existing diaspora theory.

Diasporic Trauma: Intergenerational Difference and Cultural Identity

In this section, I will briefly discuss how traumatic experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration are inherent to black British diasporic identity. This discussion relates to the ways in which the two novelists narrate their individual stories into the collective memories of black people in Britain. However, as both authors define themselves as decidedly British, the collective memories of slavery, colonialism and migration are re-imagined into the collective history of Britain. In this sense, my analysis follows Gilroy’s claim that ‘histories of suffering should not be allocated exclusively to their victims’.³¹

³⁰ Henke, p. xv.

³¹ Gilroy, *Between Camps*, p. 114.

The concept of diaspora usefully illuminates the many ways individual and collective traumatic events are narrated in black British literature. In the previous chapter, I used the concept to illustrate how different generations experience location as constitutive of their subjectivity. In this chapter, I will argue that this difference also provides useful insight into the representation of collective traumatic experiences in *Fruit of the Lemon* and *Stuck Up a Tree*. In this regard, Gilroy is again instructive as he argues that unspeakable terrors such as slavery and colonialism are inherent to the diaspora experience. As he puts it, in the Black Atlantic diaspora cultural identities hinge on 'remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the tearful process of dispersal'.³² His understanding of diaspora bears many resemblances to Hirsch's notion of postmemory where memories that are passed on from one generation to the next forge a collective identity. However, the handing on of memories is more complicated than Gilroy suggests here.

In my analysis of the two novels, I propose that the notion of migration can be seen as a historical rupture that separates individuals from their collective pasts. If the historical rupture of the Holocaust has led to a crisis in witnessing for the Jewish diaspora, the Second World War and the period of decolonisation throughout the British Empire also prompted other kinds of historical ruptures that may be considered in dialogue with the Holocaust. Think not only of the trauma of Partition in South Asia and the painful processes of decolonisation throughout Africa and the Caribbean, but also of the promise of migration to Britain and the separation from a common, shared collective identity in the Caribbean.³³ In light of such understandings of the history of postwar migration to Britain, my examination of cultural identities and the formation of subjectivities in the two selected novels draws again on Hall and Brah.

³² Ibid., p. 124.

³³ For more on the trauma of Partition, see for example, Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

According to Stuart Hall, the historical rift of migration and diaspora has led to two ways of thinking about cultural identity. First, as ‘one, shared culture, a sort of collective “one true self”, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves”, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common’.³⁴ His argument relates to the importance of shared experiences of slavery and colonialism that have been brought to light in order to establish an essential ‘Black’ identity in the name of anti-colonial and anti-racist movements. In this sense, a collective ‘Black’ identity is necessary in the struggle for access to representation. This view, he argues, offers an ‘imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas’.³⁵ However, Hall also offers a second position that recognises that, ‘as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute “what we really are”; or rather – since history has intervened – “what we have become”’.³⁶ In this understanding, Hall points to the very politics of representation that is crucial to my analysis of these two novels. This view of cultural identity supports my argument that, while both authors seek to connect with a collective sense of history, they both promote individual subjectivities that highlight the differences between the, in fact, many identities subsumed under the category ‘Black’. By contrast to Durrant’s point that individuals seek closure through writing, Hall argues that the different ways in which people position themselves in relation to history are crucial for understanding the traumatic character of the colonial experience. As he says,

far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are

³⁴ Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 223.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 224.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.³⁷

Hall's observation emphasises the intricate connections between various histories that place the individual in the collective history and in this way, the personal life story becomes a part of the collective, shared memory. Moreover, the narration of cultural identity does not seek a fixed closure, but is a continual process of creation.

In the two selected novels, the two authors explore their individual experiences of growing up in Britain. As both authors explore their relation to collective histories elsewhere, a deterritorialised geography of Britain emerges where spaces and locations are vested with meaning through histories that are produced by all of its inhabitants. While McLeod focuses predominantly on her experience of growing up in the north of England, her collective history of slavery, colonialism and migration – as embodied by her parents and siblings – contributes to the deconstruction of dominant British history as synonymous with whiteness. For my analysis of this aspect – and the intergenerational difference in the experience of traumatic histories – Brah's notion of diaspora space is again instructive. Whereas London can be seen as a geographical diaspora space, Britain is equally a historical diaspora space, where the personal histories of migrants and their descendants contribute to the collective history of contemporary Britain. This understanding of the black diasporic history of Britain leads back to Gilroy's initial point about relegating traumatic memories of slavery and colonialism not only to the victims of colonisation but also to the colonisers.

History and Trauma: The Literary Context

My two examples of novels that explore the traumatic experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration in different ways are part of a broader recent literary

³⁷ Ibid.

engagement with those collective histories. In this section, I will briefly contextualise the two novels and explain how they are relevant for my project in this thesis. To consider contemporary black and Asian British literature through the concept of trauma is not to neglect the very ‘cheerful’ fictions – as McLeod calls them – that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. With the notable exceptions of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) and Kamila Shamsie’s *Salt and Saffron* (2000), contemporary Asian British novelists have to date dealt little with the traumatic experience of Partition.³⁸ By contrast, contemporary black British novelists of Caribbean descent have increasingly engaged with the traumatic experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration in their novels. Briefly put, this body of literature has taken two forms. For instance, David Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress* (1999), Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), S. I. Martin’s *Incomparable World* (1996) and Caryl Phillip’s *Cambridge* (1991) revisit the history of black people in Britain before the Windrush-generation.³⁹ To echo Gilroy, these novels return to the long history of black people in Britain and re-imagine the traumatic history of slavery in order to maintain, invent and renew black British identity. Significantly, Andrea Levy’s latest novel, *The Long Song* (2010) – set in mid-nineteenth century Jamaica and London – also engages with the history of slavery in the British Empire.⁴⁰ Considering *The Long Song* in light of Levy’s entire authorship is instructive here, because it highlights the centrality of trauma in *Fruit of the Lemon*. In *Fruit of the Lemon* – and in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* (1997), Lucinda Roy’s *Lady Moses* and Jenny McLeod’s *Stuck Up a Tree*, for instance – a return to the shared, collective history of the Caribbean, in Hall’s

³⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* (London: Cape, 1981); Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice-Candy-Man* (London: Heinemann, 1988); Kamila Shamsie, *Salt and Saffron* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000). Interestingly, the trauma of Partition figured prominently in early texts such as Attia Hosain’s *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953) and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), Mumtaz Shah Nawaz’s, *The Heart Divided* (Lahore: Mumtaz Publications, 1957) and Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956).

³⁹ David Dabydeen, *A Harlots Progress* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999); Fred D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997); S. I. Martin, *Incomparable World* (London: Quartet, 1996); Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991)

⁴⁰ Andrea Levy, *The Long Song* (London: Headline Review, 2010)

first sense, is less available.⁴¹ In a Freudian sense, this impossibility of accessing a collective trauma is what causes a crisis of identity that can be resolved by re-imagining the event through life writing. As black British authors have increasingly explored their individual experiences in relation to the collective memories of the past, my examination of the interface between trauma and life writing becomes ever-more necessary.

Why examine these two particular novels then? To read *Fruit of the Lemon* and *Stuck Up a Tree* in conjunction is productive for understanding the nature of trauma in contemporary black British writing. Moreover, they illuminate some of the major characteristics of black and Asian British women's life writing from the 1990s. Both authors were born in Britain to Jamaican parents who arrived as part of the Windrush-generation; both novels were published in the late 1990s – as Britain was readying for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the *Windrush* – and both novels centre on young women of West Indian descent who experience a crisis of identity. Each in their own way, however, these two authors explore this crisis of identity – and, in Levy's case, recovery – and, in doing so, engage with the traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism and migration. While Levy's novel is a first person narrative that employs the conventional 'I' conventionally used in autobiographical narratives, McLeod's third person narrative challenges the orthodox conventions of the autobiographical form. The third person autobiographical form, argues Philippe Lejeune, is used for 'internal distancing and for expressing personal confrontation'.⁴² It allows the author to stage her present identity as different from when she was younger. Significantly, while both narratives are individual works of fiction, neither of them seek either closure or to establish a fixed cultural identity. Indeed, they re-imagine their

⁴¹ Bernardine Evaristo, *Lara* (Speldhurst: Angela Royal, 1997)

⁴² Philippe Lejeune, 'Autobiography in the Third Person', *New Literary History*, 9, 1 (1977), 27-50 (p. 28).

subjective cultural identities in process and as fragmented, and re-assert them into the narratives of the past.

Examining Levy alongside McLeod also illuminates some of the shifts within black British cultural production that have occurred since the late 1980s. Once described as Britain's most prolific black female novelist, Levy is one of the most successful British authors today.⁴³ Her bestselling novels *Small Island* (2004) and *The Long Song* (2010) are testimony not only to the endurance of black British literature, but also to the necessity of remembering traumatic histories within the history of Britain.⁴⁴ Moreover, in a private interview with Levy in 2010, she revealed that she was marketed as a black author in the 1990s, whereas she is now often considered part of mainstream British literary establishment.⁴⁵ Levy's growing popularity and inclusion in Britain's mainstream literary landscape is also evident from the sales figures of *Fruit of the Lemon*, which has sold around 56,000 copies, while *Small Island* has sold more than 840,000 in the UK. This shift from 'black' to mainstream is indicative of the ways in which black and Asian authors are currently marketed.

McLeod's place within the growing canon of black British cultural production is quite different. Starting out as a successful playwright in the late 1980s, she was shortly thereafter approached by the feminist publishing house Virago which requested two chapters for a novel, which she turned into *Stuck Up a Tree*. In the mid-1980s, supported by grants from the Greater London Council, many black theatre groups like The Black Mime Theatre Company, Talawa Theatre Company, The Black Theatre Forum and particularly black women's groups like Theatre of Black Women (co-founded by Bernardine Evaristo), the Women's Troop and Munirah Theatre Company

⁴³ Raekha Prasad, 'Two Sides to Every Story', *Guardian*, 4 March 1999.

[<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/1999/mar/04/gender.uk>] Accessed 2 February 2011.

⁴⁴ According to Nielsen BookScan, *Small Island* has sold more than 840,000 in the UK. Data obtained 02 September 2010. Personal correspondence.

⁴⁵ Private interview with Andrea Levy, 22 July 2010; Nick Peter Turner, *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 63.

emerged. At the same time, a number of black and Asian female playwrights such as Bernardine Evaristo, Jackie Kay and Meera Syal came into prominence.⁴⁶ As with Evaristo, Kay and Syal, McLeod also started out in theatre and then moved into literature. 'The novel was much, much easier', McLeod says.⁴⁷ The positions of Evaristo, Kay and McLeod are significant here: First, within the growing canon of black and Asian British cultural studies, there has been less critical attention to black and Asian British women's theatre and drama. Although the focus of this thesis is on novels, I note here that black and Asian British cultural production is not limited to literature, but should be viewed in relation to the wider historical and social context. Second, when the Conservative government abolished the Greater London Council in 1986, the financial support for many black women's theatre groups also disappeared.⁴⁸ However, around this time, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, black and Asian British literature was gaining increasing popularity in British mainstream publishing. McLeod's move from the theatre world into the world of literature can be seen as a reflection of those developments.

Empire's Child: Andrea Levy's Fruit of the Lemon

In what ways does life writing inflect *Fruit of the Lemon*? The novel, set in two locations, investigates the traumatic historical experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration, and how such experiences influence the author's subjectivity through the use of life writing. Due to the historical ruptures in time, the novel does not employ traditional autobiography's coherent form. Instead, Levy experiments and brings in oral narrative and stories of other family members in order to give an accurate account of the

⁴⁶ Gabriele Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); King, pp. 211-23.

⁴⁷ Mark Patterson, 'It's One Ella've a Debut Novel: City Author Draws on Family Life', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 July 1999, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Andrea Enisouh, 'Greater London Council', in *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, ed. by Alison Donnell (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 129-30.

self. Moreover, the novel adopts a non-chronological structure, which defies the definitions of traditional autobiography. These elements in the novel derive from the form of life writing.

In the concluding pages of *Fruit of the Lemon*, after returning from Jamaica, where she has re-discovered her collective cultural identity, the narrator proclaims: 'I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day' (p. 327). The sentence points as much to the past as it does to the future, and is crucial for understanding Levy's increasing interest in exploring how the traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism and migration impact on her individual subjective identity. The sentence also signals the narrator's fragmented and hybrid subjectivity that straddles various overlapping historical narratives. My analysis of her novel pursues the idea that Jamaican migration to Britain in the postwar years caused a historical rift between the collective, shared memory of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean and the experiences of racism in 1960s and 1970s Britain. These racist experiences deny the main character's subjectivity and agency, and place her in a collective history which she has no immediate access to, and that is represented as external to mainstream British history. Consequently, as the narrator attempts to work through the experiences of racism in the present, she has to explore her collective past in the Caribbean. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, this search for a collective identity necessarily entails experimenting with the structure of the novel.

In the wake of migration to Britain, the parental generation repressed memories of slavery and colonialism, leaving the second generation without any sense of collective cultural identity. In light of this absence, it is pertinent to address how Levy explores the links between Jamaica and Britain and the historical experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration? How does she narrate her personal experience into the collective memory of these experiences? How does she work through the belated effects of

trauma? And how does she employ the form of life writing to do so? Attending to these questions, this analysis will first introduce Levy and situate the novel in relation to her earlier work. My examination will then focus on a series of racist experiences in the novel that eventually lead to the main character's crisis of identity and breakdown. This is then considered in relation to how the main character works through her traumatic experiences in the second part of the novel, before examining the novel as a form of life writing and exploring how Levy uses an irregular and non-linear structure to accommodate her subjectivity.

Born in London in 1956 to Jamaican parents, Levy grew up on various council estates in North London, where most of her novels are also set. Her father served in the RAF during the Second World War and returned to Britain on the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948, and her mother followed shortly thereafter. Levy worked in the Royal Opera House and the BBC costume departments before turning to writing novels in her mid-thirties. Inspired by African American authors like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and books published by feminist presses such as Virago and The Women's Press, Levy wanted to write the novels that she, as a young black woman, had always wanted to read: 'I was desperate to go into a bookshop, pick up a book and read about being Black in Britain and not having come from somewhere else, of actually being born here and having to create your own identity'.⁴⁹

In her five novels to date, Levy has increasingly set out to explore the intricate connections between the histories of Britain and Jamaica, attempting to narrate her individual subjective identity into the collective experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration that is central to contemporary black British cultural identity. In her first three novels, she explored her own experience of growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. She attended a creative writing class and drew on the death of her father as inspiration for

⁴⁹ Kesewa Hennessy, 'A Girl From Nowhere', *Voice*, 6 August 1996, p. 24.

her first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994).⁵⁰ Set in the North London of the 1960s, Levy's debut novel revolves around the young Angela, who relives her childhood years as her ailing father is hospitalised and eventually dies. As Levy says, '[*Every Light in the House Burnin'*] is semi-autobiographical It was about the death of my father'.⁵¹ Levy's second novel, *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996), also set on a council estate in North London, details the adolescence of two very different sisters, Vivien and Olive, in the 1970s.⁵² 'It is my shadow', Levy says of her second novel. 'It's not me, but it has my shape. I know about the things that happened in the book – but it's a fiction'.⁵³ Similarly to Srivastava and Perera, Levy narrates her subjectivity into the landscape of London in relation to her parents. This, however, changes in *Fruit of the Lemon*, when she explores her past:

The first three [novels] I see as a baton race, passing the baton on to the next person. I suppose it was about exploring aspects of my life, although in fiction. I didn't research it, obviously; it was there in my head for those three books. ... with *Fruit of the Lemon*, I started that backward look, when Faith goes into her family, once I had actually asked my mum about our family and gone to history books and had a look. Before I wasn't so interested in the link between Jamaica, the Caribbean and Britain. I was much more, 'we're black British, we're here, and how are we going to move on?' And that's absolutely part of what I do, too, but I didn't think that looking backwards was so important, whereas now I think it is absolutely important and so fascinating.⁵⁴

From the outset, the novel follows on from Levy's two earlier novels, focusing on racism in contemporary Britain – 'we're black British, we're here' – which is important for understanding Levy's exploration of her collective history and cultural identity – 'how are we going to move on?'. In order to explore her negotiation of the past, present and future, it is pertinent to examine how the main character's individual identity is

⁵⁰ Andrea Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (London: Headline Review, 1994)

⁵¹ Hennessy, 'A Girl From Nowhere', p. 24.

⁵² Andrea Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere* (London: Headline Review, 1996)

⁵³ Hennessy, 'A Girl From Nowhere', p. 24.

⁵⁴ Susan Alice Fischer, 'Andrea Levy in Conversation with Susan Alice Fischer', *Changing English*, 12 (2005), 361-71 (p. 362).

threatened by a series of racist experiences that cause a crisis of identity for the main character. My analysis of these experiences in the novel will show how Levy came to realise that she had to look to her past for a sense of her cultural identity in the present.

At school, racism works on two levels. In the first instance, the main character, Faith, is bullied by boys who tauntingly say, 'Your mum and dad came on a banana boat' (p. 3). In this episode, she is represented and subjected into a collective black history she has no memory of. Her parents' experience of postwar migration to Britain is reduced to a journey 'on a banana boat'. If her parents had passed on to her stories of their migration to Britain and the contribution they have made to British society, she would have been able to respond and correct these boys' view of black people. Instead, she is unable to register the event, in Freudian terms, and cannot comprehend the experience in the moment. It is only as re-telling and re-imagining through the novel that Levy is able to work through this experience. Second, on an institutional level, her history lessons at school have taught her nothing about West Indian migration to Britain in the postwar years, so Faith is surprised when her mother informs her that, 'We came on a banana boat to England, your dad and me. The Jamaica Producers' banana boat' (p. 3). Remembering the illustrations of slave ships from her history lessons, Faith pictures them 'curled up on the floor of a ship, wrapped in a blanket perhaps, trying to find a comfortable spot amongst the spiky prongs of unripe bananas' (p. 4). On one level, this wilful repression – or 'postcolonial amnesia', as Gandhi calls it – happens because of Faith's parents' desire for self-invention in Britain.⁵⁵ On another level, her parents have repressed their history in Jamaica because it is too traumatic to be told:

My mum and dad never talked about their lives before my brother Carl and I were born, they didn't sit us in front of the fire and tell long tales of life in Jamaica – of palm trees and yams and playing by rivers. There was no 'oral tradition' in our family. Most of my childhood questions to them were answered with, 'That was a

⁵⁵ Gandhi, p. 4.

long time ago,' or 'What you want to know about that for?' And if mum ever let something slip – 'You know your dad lived in a big house,' – then I was told with a wagging finger not to go blabbing it to my friends, not to repeat it to anyone. (p. 4)

This separation from a collective family history – and consequently the history of slavery, colonialism and migration – renders Faith unaware of her own collective cultural identity. The episode here also points to Faith's individual sense of selfhood.

In less obvious ways, the tension between her individual cultural identity and the collective experience of the black diaspora is evident in her workplace experiences. In these episodes, Levy points to the many ways black people in Britain were still represented as 'others' in the 1970s. For example, Faith is told by her employer, Olivia, that: 'Your work has an ethnicity which shines through A sort of African or South American feel which is obviously part of you' (p. 31). In what is on the surface a compliment, Faith's cultural identity is described as different from that of Olivia's own secure British identity. Unaware of this African or South American feel, Faith responds: 'As I was born and bred in Haringey I could only suppose that I had some sort of collective unconscious that was coning through from my slave ancestry' (p. 31). In this case, Faith is made to bear a collective history of slavery and colonialism without having any direct memory of that history.

In a later episode, when working for the BBC Television costume department, the complexities of her cultural identity are again exposed. Although now working for the BBC, which indicates that she is now part of mainstream Britain, she is hampered when she wants to apply for a job as a dresser: 'But they don't have black dressers' (p. 70), says her new boss, Lorraine, who continues, 'Oh sorry, ... I don't mean to be horrible but it's just what happens here' (p. 71). This institutionalised racism is not directly aimed at Faith – in fact Lorraine encourages her to apply anyway: 'you'll probably be all right because everyone likes you' (p. 71) – but she is still implicated. Faith is

invariably interpellated as black, but not like other black people, while Lorraine identifies herself as white, but not like other white racist people. Relating to Hall's second notion of diasporic cultural identity, which stresses the differences between black people, in these instances, Faith does not position herself in the narratives of the past. In both of these episodes, she is 'positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation', as Hall says.⁵⁶ In these instances, the strategies of life writing offers not only Levy an opportunity to work through these traumatic instances but it also allows her to represent her selfhood and challenge those dominant ideologies that have represented her.

Slowly acknowledging that these experiences impact on her sense of selfhood, she realises that her collective black diasporic cultural identity is as important as those formed around notions of gender and class. However, as she has only received representations of black people through dominant white British society, she has internalised her own difference negatively and is unable to give voice to her sense of selfhood. On an evening out with her roommate Marion and Marion's father, they attend a poetry reading where the last act is a black poet. By the sight of him, Faith becomes aware of her black cultural identity:

Suddenly, as I looked up at this black poet I became aware that the poet and me were the only black people in the room. I looked around again – it was now a room of white people.

I became nervous waiting for the poet to start. I was thinking, 'Please be good, please.' The poet became my dad, my brother, he was the unknown black faces in our photo album, he was the old man on the bus who called by sister, the man in the bank with the strong Trinidadian accent who could not make him understood. He was every black man – ever (p. 92).

Faith internalises this 'nervous condition' of black people, so when Marion's dad comments happily on the poet leaving the stage, Faith realises that Marion's dad's racist

⁵⁶ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 225.

remarks are just as much aimed at her as they are at the black poet.⁵⁷ Marion excuses her father's remarks with them being 'a cultural thing' (p. 93). Marion invokes her working-class background, goes into a Marxist and feminist rant and assures Faith that 'all racism would be swept away after the revolution. As a feminist we were all sisters' (p. 94). Marion continues:

These things can be so easily internalised and I wouldn't want you to. I mean as a woman in this society I think I know how you must feel. I can understand that you might be angry be what you heard in my house today, for example. It's going to take time but the working classes are already forming allegiances with a lot of black organisations (p. 94).

To which Faith finally shouts: 'Oh shut up Marion!' (p. 94). Faith realises that racism cuts across issues of gender and class. In this instance, Levy's novel challenges feminist criticism based on an essential female subject and complicates it by adding the complexities of race and cultural identity. As Davies argues, black female identities are produced in the conjunction of race and gender, and the episode demonstrates how Levy negotiates her fragmented and hybrid identity.

Awakening to a sense of a collective black diasporic cultural identity based on the shared, common experiences of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean, Faith begins to confront those intricate connections between Britain and Jamaica. When she visits the countryside with her friend Simon, they go to a pub where they meet a man, Andrew Bunyan, who asks Faith:

'And whereabouts are you from, Faith?'

'London,' I said.

The man laughed a little. 'I meant more what country are you from?' I didn't bother to say I was born in England, that I was English, because I knew that was not what he wanted to hear.

'My parents are from Jamaica.'

⁵⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface' in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967 [1961]), 7-26 (p. 17): 'The status of the "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*' (italics in original).

‘Well, you see, I thought that,’ he began. ‘As soon as you walked in I thought I bet she is from Jamaica.’

‘Just my parents are,’ I added but he went on (p. 130).

When Bunyan tells her about going to Jamaica and meeting a man who shared his last name, Faith retorts: ‘Well, the thing is, that would have been his slave name, you see Your family probably owned his family once’ (p. 131). Not only does Faith recognise that her family comes from Jamaica, which has a history of slavery and colonialism, but Levy also demonstrates that these traumatic experiences should not be ‘allocated exclusively to the victims’ – in Gilroy’s words – but acknowledged and confronted by the white British as well. In this sense, Levy creates a diaspora space in which various overlapping historical narratives become entangled.

In the previous chapter, I noted that both Perera and Srivastava did not engage with the political struggles of ‘Black’ people in the 1970s and 1980s. While they did this to escape the burden of representation, Levy shows that she can confront such racist experiences without resorting to a collective ‘Black’ representation. In an important episode, Faith and her friend Simon witness a racist attack on a black woman who works in a bookshop that stocks gay and lesbian and black and Third World fiction. Adding to the shock of the experience and indicative of the period of intense racism in the streets in the 1970s, the police brush off the attack – ‘They say they’re National Front but they’re not, they’re just a bunch of thugs’ (p. 154) – and blames the bookshop for bringing this onto themselves – ‘We’ve told them not to have people in their shop on their own. I mean, they’re just asking for trouble’ (p. 154). In the wake of the assault, two different stories emerge. First, indicating that the event shatters her capacity to cognitively comprehend the experience, Faith is unable to remember significant parts of the assault. By contrast, Simon appropriates the event into his experience and relates the story to their roommates:

The story sounded different when Simon retold it. It gained more menace with hindsight. It was now a fact that three men walked into a bookshop in daylight and hit someone over the head with a blunt instrument because they didn't like them. It was real. Not something skipped over in the local paper or tutted about at the dinner table (p. 155).

The scene mirrors psychoanalysis, where the victim works through the traumatic event with a therapist. In this case, however, Faith is not allowed to work through the episode with her friends. Crucially, she interrupts Simon's story twice to remind her friends that 'the woman that was struck on the head was black like me. And both times Simon and Mick had looked at me and nodded.' (p. 156). Consequently, unable to relive the experience in the company of her friends, she resolves that, 'What it all comes down to in the end is black against white. It was simple. It was so simple' (p. 159). Hoping to relate the story to her parents, Faith returns to her parents – 'they would understand how she felt – black on the outside and cowardly custard-yellow on the inside' (p. 158) – but she is not met by an understanding family. Instead, she is introduced to a white family which turns out to be her brother's black girlfriend's family. As she is confronted with the intertwined histories of Britain and its former colonies, embodied in this interracial relationship, Faith's simplified version of the world crumbles: 'I couldn't look into her eyes. It was simple. I felt dizzy. It was so simple. I ran' (p. 160). As Levy makes clear here, although racism in the novel is aimed at black people in general, it is impossible to represent 'Black' people as a collective identity within Britain. However, as she also makes clear in the second part of the novel, it is equally necessary to acknowledge the shared, common experiences of colonialism. In this sense, her sense of subjectivity relates well to Hall's two understandings of cultural identity as one embracing the collective past and another emphasising the many differences between black people in the diaspora.

Throughout the first part of the novel, the main character undergoes a transformation that eventually leads to her breakdown. Growing up in 1960s and 1970s

Britain, Faith has no desire for a homeland elsewhere and her experience of diaspora is different from that of her parents. Faith's sense of a black diasporic cultural identity that hinges on the memory of a shared, collective experience of slavery and colonialism – as Hall and Gilroy argue – is missing. Instead, she is positioned within the dominant regimes of representation that make her see herself as other as well. Subject to these racist experiences, she gradually awakens to a sense of essential 'Black' collective identity, but Levy shows that this position is untenable too. In other words, these racist experiences cause a wound to the mind that she – at the time – is unable to register or, indeed, represent. This leads to a 'crisis of identity' which she attempts to resolve by denying her black cultural identity altogether:

I got into bed. But as my eyes adjusted to the dark I could see my reflection in the wardrobe mirror. A black girl lying in a bed. I covered the mirror with a bath towel. I didn't want to be black any more. I just wanted to live. The other mirror in the room I covered with a tee-shirt. *Voila!* I was no longer black' (p. 160).

Following her breakdown, Faith's mother encourages her to go to Jamaica because, as she says, 'Child, everyone should know where they come from' (p. 162).

In the second part of the novel, Levy challenges those dominant regimes of representation that position Faith outside dominant British history and shows the intricate connections between Britain and Jamaica. It is this interweaving of histories that allows Levy to work through the experience of trauma in two ways: as a narratological strategy and as an autobiographical act. Considering first the narratological part – the way Levy memorialises the experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration – the structure of the novel is significant. Due to the many ways in which black people have been represented as 'others' within the dominant structures of power, Levy's effort to make sense of the past necessarily involves a strategy that can accommodate this sense of fragmented selfhood. As the next section will demonstrate,

the narration of her fragmented and hybrid subjectivity is reflected in the 'irregularity' of the novel which is 'disconnected, fragmentary, [and] organised into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters', as Jelinek argues.⁵⁸

In the absence of memories passed on from her parents, Faith's experience of diaspora is not dominated by narratives that preceded her birth, as Hirsch suggested in her definition of postmemory.⁵⁹ Those narratives, however, are related to her in Jamaica by family members, and in this sense, the notion of postmemory is useful. As she has little knowledge of her family history upon arrival in Jamaica, Faith's family tree is limited to herself, her brother and her parents. Her cultural identity in Britain is contrasted with her experience of arriving in Jamaica: 'everything was a little familiar but not quite. Like a dream. Culture shock is how the feeling is described' (p. 169). If Faith's sense of belonging in Britain hinged on her being black, then, in Jamaica, Levy shows that being black does not necessarily mean that she is at home there. Instead, this is a process where she narrates herself – and is narrated by her family members – into the past. In response to the absence of an 'oral tradition' in Faith's family in Britain, she is told stories by family members *of* family members – 'Coral's Story told to me by Coral' (p. 189), 'Cecelia's Story told to me by Vincent' (p. 257) and 'Wade's Story told to me by Violet' (p. 279) are such instances – whose histories draw trajectories to the black diaspora in Harlem, New York City, the history of skilled Jamaicans working on the construction of the Panama Canal, and ancestors and family members in Cuba and Scotland. She learns of her slave ancestry while also discovering a plantation owner from England, and others of Scottish, Arawak or Indian descent, which suggests the hybrid nature of Jamaican identity in the first place. Tellingly, these stories are interspersed between the narrator's voice and suggests that Levy's attempt to assemble a useful past necessarily relies on other fictional voices.

⁵⁸ Jelinek, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Hirsch, p. 22.

Relating to Gilroy's argument, the telling and retelling of these family stories serve as nodal points in the social memory of the collective cultural identity that makes up the black experience in Jamaica. Importantly, bearing Hall's insight in mind, these are personal stories that recognise the differences within that diverse black experience in Jamaica. As memories of her past are revealed, Faith forges a connection with a shared, collective Jamaican cultural identity yet is also aware of her British cultural identity, as one branch of the black diaspora in Britain. In this sense, Levy asserts her individual subjective identity into the collective narratives of the past through the use of life writing.

Before she went to Jamaica, Faith believed that her history began when her parents arrived in Britain on a banana boat: 'I thought that my history started when the ship carrying my parents sailed from Jamaica and docked in England on Guy Fawkes' night' (p. 325). In Jamaica, however, she is introduced to a shared history of slavery, colonialism, relatives in the black diaspora in the United States, Jewish ancestors and white English ancestors; a history that was kept from her because the memory of it was too traumatic to pass on. 'The country where I live', Faith says,

among people so unaware of our shared past that all they would see if they were staring at my aunt would be a black woman acting silly.

Let those bully boys walk behind me in the playground. Let them tell me, 'You're a darkie. Faith's a darkie'. I am the granddaughter of Grace and William Campbell. I am the great-grandchild of Cecelia Hilton. I am descended from Katherine whose mother was a slave. I am the cousin of Afria. I am the niece of Coral Thompson and the daughter of Wade and Mildred Jackson. Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day' (pp. 326-7).

This paragraph from the final pages of the novel is evident of Faith's transformation in Jamaica. She asserts a collective, shared history of slavery, colonialism and migration among all Britons, black and white alike. Having discovered a collective history, Faith narrates herself into that history.

Thinking of the interweaving of histories as an autobiographical strategy, the novel provides a therapeutic space for Levy to work through the personal, individual experiences of racism as well as working through her 'relation to history', in Durrant's words, and creating a shared, collective history. Initially unable to represent the first identity crisis that caused her breakdown, the text itself constitutes the conscious reliving and creative re-imagining of those racist experiences later. The inherent belatedness of trauma enables Levy to reflect on its impact and relation to the wider community, as if saying: 'I did not know it at the time but, looking back on it, this is how I experienced it'. Considering the unspeakability of these experiences, the working through in literature is inevitably less concerned with objective truth and more with personal, subjective memorialisation. Mimicking the scene of therapy – without a listener, but with a reader – these scenes are imagined creatively and constitute part of the healing process for Levy. In working through these histories, she positions herself in the narratives of the past.

On another level, the personal narration of trauma intervenes in the collective memory as well. The very fictionalisation of these events renders them open and accessible to the community. In this sense, Levy's text engages actively in passing on memories of slavery, colonialism and migration and narrating them as part of contemporary British cultural identity. In adopting this strategy, Levy confronts the dominant regimes of representation that positioned and subjected the black experience as 'other' to the West. In exploring the intricate connections that comprise the black diaspora experience in Britain, she echoes Gilroy's sentiment that the collective traumatic experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration that lies beneath contemporary black British cultural identity should not be allocated exclusively to Britain's black population. Moreover, in confronting the silences of her parents' generation and the will to forget, Levy complicates the notion of postmemory by saying

that the memories of slavery and colonialism are not necessarily passed on from one generation to the next. Instead, through the use of autobiographical elements in her novel, she engages actively in creating a contemporary cultural identity, based not only on the memories of slavery, colonialism and migration, but also on growing up in Britain. In this sense, the novel itself acts as postmemory – as passing on memories.

Running from Herself: Jenny McLeod's Stuck Up a Tree

How does life writing as a genre influence Jenny McLeod's novel? Similarly to Levy's novel, *Stuck Up a Tree* explores the ways in which the historical experiences of colonialism and migration affect the author's subjectivity. The novel employs flashbacks, an unreliable narrator, confession and stories of other family members to produce a nuanced account of the self. Such blend of narrative techniques embrace the inherent difficulty in capturing the self fully, and instead promote a fragmented identity, represented best through the form of life writing. For McLeod, life writing is a useful tool to explore historical silences and challenge the dynamics that govern the narratives of contemporary British society.

In the final pages of *Stuck Up a Tree*, after the protagonist, Ella Brightwell, has attended her mother's funeral, the narrator says: 'Now the union was made again, now even with a touch it could remain open, because now it was time' (p. 281). The sentence relates to Bhabha's argument that remembering trauma 'is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the present'. Bhabha builds on Frantz Fanon's insight into the colonial experience in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Not only did the dominant regimes of representation construct black people as different from the British, but they also subjected black people to that knowledge, so black people would internalise their difference and accordingly act white – hence Fanon's insightful

title.⁶⁰ My examination of McLeod's text pursues these ideas along two lines. First, that the historical rift caused by postwar migration to Britain disconnected the main character from her collective, shared diasporic cultural identity. In this way, the novel bears a striking similarity to Levy's text yet McLeod's aesthetic oeuvre is different. Second, the intergenerational difference in the experience of diaspora that is evident in the work of Srivastava and Perera also manifests itself in McLeod's text as a wilful estrangement from the family. However, by contrast to what happened in those two novels, the repression of cultural identity leads to a breakdown for the main character in this novel. In order to illustrate this more clearly, the novel is examined in conjunction with her short story, 'Still Rising' (1999).⁶¹

Reading McLeod's *Stuck Up a Tree* as a trauma narrative alongside Levy's text expands on our understanding of traumatic experiences in the black British context. Whereas Levy broadens her horizon – going from very personal, individual experiences in the first part to historical, collective experiences in the second part – McLeod focuses on the close family portrait in her novel. Indeed, the novel centres on the death of the main character's mother. In keeping this focus, her story serves to destabilise the essential category 'Black' and partly relieves the McLeod of the burden of representation, a burden that implies she represents all black people in her narrative. Bearing this in mind, the examination of the novel asks, how does McLeod memorialise the death of her mother and, indeed, how does this relate to the understanding of collective memory? How does McLeod represent trauma? And, how does she use the form of life writing to explore the experience of trauma? Before addressing these questions in depth, the examination will briefly introduce McLeod and consider the novel in relation to 'Still Rising'.

⁶⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 168-9.

⁶¹ Jenny McLeod, 'Still Rising', in *On the Move: Feminism for a New Generation*, ed. by Natasha Walter (London: Virago, 1999), pp. 121-134.

Considering issues of *mimesis* and repression, the analysis will next present the novel's engagement with the notion of 'truth', before focusing on the main character's relationship with her family. This is explored in two ways: first, considering issues of repression and belatedness, I examine how the family – particularly her mother – wilfully distances the protagonist from their collective cultural identity. Second, rather than considering this a one-way process where the parental generation does not pass on memories, it will also be explored how the main character distances herself from her family's cultural identity. My analysis will then consider how the healing process occurs – if indeed it does – in the novel, before investigating how McLeod narrates trauma through the form of life writing.

As part of the Windrush-generation, McLeod's parents migrated to a northern English town, where her father worked for Nottingham Transport and her mother as a nurse. Born in 1964 into a large family with four sisters in Nottingham, McLeod began her writing career at age twenty-three when she won first prize for her play, *Cricket at Camp David* (1988), which was staged at the Octagon Theatre, Bolton. Since then she has written several prize-winning plays and was Writer-in-Residence (1991-1992) at the Nottingham Playhouse, where her second play, *Island Life* (1998), was staged. The success of her plays led the publisher Virago to request two chapters for a novel, which she developed into *Stuck Up a Tree*. Whereas Levy forged connections between the black diasporas in Britain and Jamaica, McLeod's work is confined to the black British diaspora. As such, it engages in establishing a specific black British identity, which is founded upon the first generation of migrants who came to Britain in the post-war years. 'That is how West Indian families are', McLeod explains in an interview:

There's the food, there's the jokes, there's the people and there was the talk of going home. But not a lot of people know about these families. They know about Jewish families and the humour, and they know about the class structure of white

English society, but not about black British families. Not a lot is known about Jamaicans.⁶²

She portrays black British family life without necessarily embedding it in race discourse and in this sense escapes the burden of representation. As she says: 'I wake up in the morning and I think I've got to eat and pay the rent. I don't think "Oh God, I'm black"''.⁶³ Throughout the novel there are references to a black newspaper (p. 30), some family members speak in Jamaican English (p. 31), Jamaica is referred to as 'Back Home' (p. 31) and so on, but these invocations of a black identity are not posited within a racial discourse. The traumatic breakdown in the novel does not arise from a series of racist events but rather, as will be shown, because the protagonist denounces her West Indian family background.

To illustrate this more clearly, it is intellectually useful to compare the novel to 'Still Rising'. Although this short story is autobiographical – indeed, it follows the conventions of traditional autobiography, as Lejeune defines it – it is not read here for verification of certain episodes in *Stuck Up a Tree*.⁶⁴ Instead, it illuminates the centrality of family narratives – in particular her mother – in black British cultural identity and fills in the gaps in the novel. The theme of family narratives will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3. In many ways comparable to some of the main arguments proposed in Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe's *The Heart of the Race* (1985), the short story foregrounds the struggles black women have had to endure throughout history:

the feminism of my mother and the women of her generation was born from a knowledge they carried within themselves, something they learnt about at the feet of their own mothers and their mothers before them: racism and inequality.⁶⁵

⁶² Patterson, p. 33.

⁶³ Claire Armitstead, 'The Rising Profile: A Vibrant New Generation of Black Women Playwrights Has Hit the Spotlight. But What do They Actually Have in Common?', *Guardian*, November 30, 1994, p. T4.

⁶⁴ Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract', p. 193.

⁶⁵ McLeod, 'Still Rising', p. 122. Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985)

While establishing collective histories between black women across the generations – indeed, the memories of slavery and colonialism are passed on from one generation to the next – McLeod also stresses the differences between her own generation and that of her mother:

My sisters and I, married or single, with or without children, all have a degree of control over our lives that our mother never had. The very choice of whether to live alone or not is a choice my mother never had the chance to make. [...] So first generation black British women have begun to take the steps forward and away from their mothers, steps that their mothers made sacrifices for and prayed for.⁶⁶

It is in light of these observations that *Stuck Up a Tree* provides an interesting perspective on the necessity of passing on memories of slavery, colonialism and migration among black people. It also illustrates that more individual sense of selfhood that is evident among McLeod's generation.

In the novel, McLeod complicates the inherent problems in mediating and passing on those memories. From the outset, the narrator establishes that the protagonist struggles to remember certain experiences of her childhood. In doing so, the novel relates to Bernheim's and Babinski's *anti-mimetic* understanding of false memory, and sets up an interesting relationship between the narrator and the protagonist. The protagonist, going through the experiences in the past, did not cognitively and truthfully comprehend what happened to her. The narrator, however, speaking from the present, is consciously reliving and putting into words the traumatic experiences. In this sense, the novel itself, as was the case with *Fruit of the Lemon*, is an instance of scriptotherapy, as Henke argues, and it allows McLeod to work through her past.⁶⁷ It is only in this belatedness that the trauma in the novel is re-imagined and understood.

On a narratological level, this is illustrated by McLeod in her playing with the notion of truth. On the first page of the novel, the narrator says: 'She'd been on this road

⁶⁶ McLeod, 'Still Rising', p. 126.

⁶⁷ Henke, p. xv.

before. Truth is she'd been on this road her whole life and in the darkness it stretched out before her' (p. 1). The narrator knows what is coming ahead but the protagonist still has to go through these experiences. Again, on page two, 'Truth is, the day had already been charted, but not by her' (p. 2). These deliberations on the truth suggest that the narrator is withholding information from the protagonist – Ella might think that things are a certain way, but there are other 'truths' to be acknowledged and she has to contend with these in order to relive them. This is evident from the protagonist's deliberate creation of her version of her life story:

When she had first arrived in London she used to run this story to anyone who'd listen, that she'd been born on a road. She was born on a road in the back of a Zephyr in between the two towns she couldn't remember the names of. Some place up north, nearly off the edge of the map, nearly falling into the sea even. For some reason it suited her, it made sense. In fact she had never been told the story of her birth. She suspected it wasn't nice since Brownie had never spoken of it, at least not to her (p. 1).

These intergenerational silences between the main character and her mother are indicative of their different experiences of diaspora.

Having left Hanville for London thirteen years before, the young protagonist, Ella Brightwell – or Pinkette, as she is affectionately called by her family – has not seen her mother or any of her family members since then. As the narrator says, this is a pattern she established in her childhood: 'she told herself that she was running from her family and their strangeness, but she could just as easily have been running from herself' (p. 7). This estrangement from her family and herself is crucial for understanding the notion of trauma in the novel. Being singled out as different from the rest of her family, Ella internalises the collective, cultural identity of her family as negative and distances herself from her family. This relates to Fanon's insight into the crippling nature of colonialism. As Fanon argues, colonialism distorted and destroyed the past of the oppressed people, and turned it into a history of shame. Colonialism justified itself as

protecting the colonised from regressing into ‘barbarism, degradation and bestiality’, as he says.⁶⁸ In place of the collective history of slavery and colonialism, she conforms to the dominant representation of the norm and positions her subjectivity only in relation to Britain. In this light, the return to her mother’s funeral sets off a painful re-membering of the past, as Bhabha says.

From the outset, the structure of the novel alludes to McLeod’s fragmented sense of history. For her, the narration of selfhood involves a careful remembering and re-assembling of the past in order to make sense of the present. It is exactly this putting together of the distorted and fragmented past that involves living with, what Bhabha calls, a ‘doubly inscribed’ subjectivity that embodies the collective history of the past and the individual history of the self.⁶⁹ In this sense, the novel challenges conventional perceptions of the genre of autobiography and operates, instead, along a continuum between autobiography and fiction. A marriage proposal and news of the death of her mother set off the story. As Ella returns to her family to attend her mother’s funeral, she revisits her childhood through a series of flashbacks. In this sense, the death of her mother is not the initial trauma, but the return to her family – and the reliving of her childhood – constitutes the traumatic experience. Most of these flashbacks revolve around Ella’s mother – the impressive Brownie – whose cultural identity is intricately bound up with food. Ella Brightwell is a young successful owner of a London-restaurant, BrightWell’s, which caters Jamaican food to ‘white people who thought it was trendy and would pay way over the odds for it’ (p. 3). For both mother and daughter, the issue of food is essential to their cultural identity but it is also symptomatic of the rift between them and it is therefore worth exploring more in detail here.

⁶⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 169.

⁶⁹ Bhabha, p. 92.

In the novel, McLeod make no direct references to the collective histories of slavery, colonialism and migration. However, by implication such memories are conveyed through other cultural practices such as food. In Chapter 3, I will return to the idea that family patterns are established through everyday cultural practices. Brownie's West Indian – and, by extension, the family's – cultural identity is inextricably bound up with food:

In truth, all emotion that breathed and bubbled up and over in the Pink House was illustrated through food What the family ate of a morning, afternoon and evening became the barometer of how they were feeling. What the family felt became the marker to what Brownie served up to them, so'til all three – her mother, food and family emotion – became intertwined and no one ever seriously asked 'Is what this?' or 'Why we eating this?' (p. 17).

When other children were taught to sit up straight at the table or only speak when spoken to, Ella was taught that 'Food had soul' (p. 9). However, if food as an everyday practice serves as postmemory, there is also a distance between the generations which is enshrined in secrecy: 'through food Ella learnt vast amounts about her mother one minute, then had to reconsider in the next when Brownie confounded her with something she said or did' (p. 9). If Brownie's identity is established in connection with food, she does not pass that on to Ella and the notion of postmemory is complicated. As also evident in Levy's novel, the West Indian identity is hidden from the second generation. This is clear from Brownie's spice cupboard where she keeps her spices locked away which only intrigues Ella the more:

Brownie stuck her hand down her cleavage, lifted one of her huge breasts, pulled out a huge key and unlocked the cupboard. It was always kept locked. It had the biggest, blackest padlock Ella had ever seen It was the only place in the House that was kept locked and no one but her mother knew why Things went on in this locked cupboard, Ella knew. She heard them. She tasted them. And only her mother knew what things (p. 10).

On a personal level, the main character is aware of her mother's collective cultural identity as different from her own. In this respect, the novel differs from *Fruit of the Lemon*, where the protagonist had very little sense of her parents' West Indian heritage.

The key to the spice cupboard is central to the representation of collective and individual identities in the novel. On one level, Ella's desire to obtain the key to her mother's collective identity signals a will to embrace two overlapping narratives that inflects her sense of subjectivity. However, on another level, McLeod also shows that Ella's motives for obtaining the key are more selfish. For her, the key will give her access to her mother's recipes which she will use in her own restaurant in London. In this sense, Ella's subjectivity is represented as more individual at the beginning. Ever since childhood, she has been obsessed with obtaining the key to the cupboard. As she is about to run away the second time:

Ella saw on the table, next to the huge mixing bowl that was jerking under the rigours of her mother's efforts, the large black key that fitted the great lock of the spice and herb cupboard. Ella had never touched the key before; she had never seen it separated from her mother's person before because Brownie wore it in the bath, in church, in bed and in her meetings and memories. Now it was on the table. Ella wanted to pick it up and unlock the mysteries of the spice and herb cupboard (pp. 14-5).

Before she gets the opportunity, Brownie interferes and hinders Ella. There is a sense here that – although food is important for Brownie's sense of cultural identity – she does not want to pass this on to her children.

The belated effects of this absence of history manifest themselves when Ella returns to attend her mother's funeral. McLeod complicates this, though, and suspends Ella's conscious reliving of this history at first. Upon arriving at her parents' house, Ella is still obsessed with the key and discovers it in Brownie's hand: 'If she had that key she could unlock the spice and herb cupboard, discover Brownie's secret, take it and know her. She had to have that key' (p. 146). This obsession grows even more when she

realises the potential of opening the cupboard: 'Not only could she solve a childhood mystery in finding out just what Brownie had in there by way of cooking secrets, she could also use the secrets to help BrightWells' (p. 171). At this point in the narrative, Ella does not realise the consequences of attaining the key to her mother's cultural identity.

A central aspect of the novel is the inability to acknowledge collective cultural traumas and the importance of such memories to be passed on. Trauma theory assumes *a priori* that the victim is aware of a repressed trauma that can be relived and re-imagined through therapy. However, as is clear from McLeod's novel, becoming aware of the initial trauma is crucial for understanding and working through trauma. This is evident in a scene in which Ella goes on to prise the key out of Brownie dead hands with a crowbar, breaking her mother's thumb in the process. As she opens the cupboard she is surprised and angered to discover that on the shelves are merely regular spices: 'One of the cornerstones of her childhood was just what it was. The thing that had so intrigued her was just that' (p. 179). At first, Ella is disappointed to discover that her mother – who she hoped was more than the complacent woman who just let her run away – actually was just that. However, upon taking a closer look she realises that, 'Something was in there, something for her was in there' (p. 179). She discovers a 'tatty old yellowing book' (p. 180) that contains, she suspects, her mother's recipes. However, she does not find her mother's recipes, but instead that her mother had written entries on each of her children. To a certain extent, these entries are similar to those 'oral narratives' that Levy employed in her novel, but McLeod does not use them to signal a fragmented sense of history.

Eventually, as Ella 'pulled out the last anchor of her childhood and opened it' (p. 251), she discovers that it is actually she who has always dissociated herself from her mother, and Brownie knows this. This realisation leads to Ella's breakdown: 'From the

heart of the House there came the loudest bawling it had heard for possibly thirty years' (p. 257). It is only when she recognises that being left out of the family hurts her that she finally breaks down. After this recognition, Ella rejoins the family and the healing can begin: 'A healing had begun last night and every step that took her bare feet down the carpet of the Pink House continued it. Past the family pictures that hung snaking their way up the wall' (pp. 272-3). Her realisation of the necessity of family narratives can be explained through Hall's two understandings of cultural identity. As he argues, it is only through the acknowledgment of both the collective and the individual identities that we can 'properly understand the traumatic character of "the colonial experience"'.⁷⁰

In the novel, the trauma arises from not knowing her mother and her collective identity and from repressing any attempts to forge a bond with her mother. McLeod's third person narrative enables her to suspend the reliving of the initial blow to the mind. It allows her to say, this is what I thought happened, but, as I came to realise, this is what actually happened. Bhabha's idea that remembering is never a quiet act of retrospection but a painful reliving of the past is illustrative here. This assembling of the past is a realisation of the destructive logic of colonialism that distorted the past of the colonised. Indeed, as Bhabha says, the memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the questions of cultural identity requires a meditation of the self and how the self has been represented.⁷¹ In each of the episodes mentioned above, Ella thinks she is the one who is being distanced by her mother but, while this may partly be so, she also eventually realises that it is actually herself who has distanced her from her mother. Bearing 'Still Rising' in mind, McLeod provides some insight into why this may be. For her mother's generation, the family provides a collective identity in the face of the fragmented history of slavery, colonialism and migration. Facing less racism and without the immediate memory of slavery and colonialism in mind, on the surface of it,

⁷⁰ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 225.

⁷¹ Bhabha, p. 90.

McLeod's main character has no need for a cultural identity rooted in the West Indian colonial experience. However, upon discovering her mother's notebook, she also has to confront her own position in the narratives of the past and relive childhood memories from another perspective.

Contending with this, the narrator alerts us to several instances where the protagonist wilfully distances herself from the family. As the family gathers for the funeral, Ella is surrounded by female family members who all remember her 'in her absence' (p. 74), but Ella resists: 'Whoever she was, whatever she had come from, she would not fall into line for no one' (p. 75). Unable to consciously comprehend the truth, Ella lies and does not acknowledge her shared, collective family history. When her sister Donna reaches out, Ella feels that

She didn't belong there, watching this woman sit in front of her reliving memories she wasn't a part of. That affected her. It slapped her hard and she did what she did around anything that reached her – she covered it with something harsh (p. 96).

Gradually, as memories are passed on from her sisters and other family members, Ella starts changing. When she talks to her father, who is remarkably absent from the novel, 'a smile was beginning not just on her face but deep inside her too' (p. 153). When her sisters Donna and Althea comfort Aunt Julie, 'Ella could not believe she felt she was at home' (p. 159). When talking to her sister Donna, 'Ella's syntax was changing' (p. 161), even though she is not interested in her sister's story and when she is surrounded by the men in her family, 'Ella found herself happy. She found questions had answers. But then she couldn't work out how because she didn't belong to these people' (p. 201). It is evident that it is she who has repressed memories of her family, leading to her breakdown in the end. Ella finds herself slowly healing – though she does not know why – but the real healing cannot commence before she acknowledges the truth.

By interesting contrast to Levy's novel, McLeod's protagonist does not go through a long healing process in the novel. Rather, the novel sets the stage for Ella's healing – the running she's been doing all her life was from both her family and herself. In this sense, it is the very conscious realisation of the past that constitutes the healing. However, whereas Ella may not work through trauma in the story, the narrator is – through telling the story – working through the memories. Hiding behind these two characters is the author, who is also working through these memories in the process of writing the novel. Unusual for an autobiographical narrative, the third person narrator allows McLeod to distance herself from the wrongs of the past. In this sense, the novel could be seen as a form of apology – a subgenre of life writing that often admits wrongdoings and expresses regret to excuse the author – from McLeod. The novel provides a creative space for McLeod to admit those wrongdoings but also to stage a defence of why it happened. Unable to consciously comprehend the initial memories of childhood, the novel itself is a self-conscious reliving of her childhood. Considering the belated and unspeakable nature of trauma, the form of life writing enables McLeod to reflect back on her distancing from her West Indian cultural identity and her re-connection with that past. Moreover, while a narratological strategy in the novel itself, the notion of truthfulness – or the inherent problems of accessing the truth – is less important for the creative aspect of trauma. Indeed, this personal story necessarily involves creative re-imagining in order to make sense of the present.

While this personal story, on the one hand, relieves McLeod of the burden of representation, the story does, on the other hand, engage with the larger issues of black British cultural identity as a shared, collective history. Whereas Levy engages directly in passing on memories of slavery, colonialism and migration, McLeod focuses on the dangers involved in forgetting and repressing the bonds between family members. Narrating herself into the family history is also an act of interweaving the histories of

Britain and Jamaica that ultimately challenges the dominant structures of representation that positioned the black experience outside the West. As a creative re-imagination, McLeod's autobiographical trauma narrative also complicates the notion of postmemory. Rather than seeing cultural identity as a one-way process of passing on memories from the parental generation to the children, McLeod suggests that the second generation must also look back to their parents. In this sense, she creates a contemporary black British cultural identity that builds not only on her own story of growing up in Britain but also on the legacy of slavery, colonialism and migration that her parents have.

Conclusion

Examining *Fruit of the Lemon* and *Stuck Up a Tree* as trauma narratives provides further insight into the particularities of contemporary black British life writing. In their own respective ways, these novels are both centrally concerned with the memorialisation of collective traumatic events that impact on cultural identity. The dominant structures of colonialism that placed the black experience as different from the British and furthermore subjected black people to that knowledge continue to haunt contemporary black British writing. Confronting such histories of slavery, colonialism and migration and the silencing of those histories from their parents' generation, these novelists use a variety of strategies to work through their relation to history in their novels. In this manner, these stories are engaged in a different historical discourse than their white counterparts. Moreover, in directly confronting the postcolonial amnesia often associated with the history of postwar migration, these novelists set themselves apart from the concerns of the older generation, yet seek to forge connections among them at the same time. This involves a reliving and re-imagining of the initial trauma in the past in order to understand the impact of it in the present. For Levy, this means

exploring her family history in Jamaica and bringing that into the national story of contemporary Britain. In this sense, Levy carves out a diaspora space where memories are negotiated and speak to each other. In McLeod's case, it means reliving childhood memories and actively recreating them in writing. In both instances, the form of life writing serves to mimic the scene of therapy where the author asserts her cultural identity creatively and positions her story in the narratives of the past.

Both of these two novels are examples of life writing, where the authors use the genre to explore and represent the ways in which they have been represented in the past. In each their own way, the two novels transcend traditional autobiography conventions and embrace other subgenres of the broad category of life writing. In *Fruit of the Lemon*, Levy includes oral narratives from relatives, for instance, and breaks the traditional chronological form of narrative by alternating between the past and the present. This suggests that Levy uses life writing to negotiate the problem of remembering experiences that lie beyond her own memory. In similar ways, McLeod's novel employs scenes of flashbacks to illustrate the impossibility of recalling past experiences. Crucially, this narrative technique does not fit the traditional description of autobiography but is a distinct feature of the broader category of life writing. In both novels, the authors negotiate their individual subjectivity in relation to collective questions of racism, cultural identity and the historical experience of colonialism. As such, they qualify as examples of black British life writing from the 1990s.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the historical rift of diaspora separated Levy and McLeod from their collective, shared histories elsewhere. The re-imagining of repressed past histories is frequently found in black British literature of the 1990s. However, whereas the historical rift of postwar migration usefully accounts for the preoccupation with passing on memories from one generation to the next in *Fruit of the Lemon* and *Stuck Up a Tree*, McLeod's novel also points to the problems associated

with the death of a parent. If postmemory usefully describes the handing on of traumatic collective memories from one generation to the next, this also implies an unbroken family narrative. Moreover, if such families are made up of supposed different races, the family narrative must rely on two or more overlapping histories. However, to what extent are collective narratives naturally passed on from family members that do not exist? How are mixed-race family narratives re-imagined through life writing? How can other family models be imagined in literature? And, how do such mixed narratives inflect the author's subjectivity? Chapter 3 explores how Lucinda Roy and Joanna Traynor use the form of life writing to engage with these questions.

**CHAPTER 3 – WRITING FAMILIES: MIXED-RACE IDENTITIES AND
ORPHANHOOD IN LUCINDA ROY’S *LADY MOSES* (1998) AND JOANNA
TRAYNOR’S *SISTER JOSEPHINE* (1997)**

This chapter examines issues of mixed-race identity as explored through the figure of the orphan in Lucinda Roy’s *Lady Moses* and Joanna Traynor’s *Sister Josephine*. These two authors negotiate both their mixed-race and orphan experience in life writing, and in the process challenge the legacies of colonialism and migration that continue to influence the politics of family, race and belonging in contemporary Britain. In this regard, the chapter explores how these two authors create alternative family models through life writing. As seen in the previous chapter, the notion of collective memories being passed on from one generation to the next is crucial for the creation of contemporary black British identities. However, as my analysis of McLeod’s novel also showed, postmemory necessarily involves a family narrative in the first place. I argue that the two novelists under scrutiny in this chapter utilise the genre of life writing to challenge dominant notions of family patterns and instead create alternative family models. In the first two chapters, I examined how the novelists’ subjectivities are inflected by their various experiences of growing up Asian or black in Britain, and how such senses of selfhood impacted on the forms of their novels. In this chapter, I examine further how the narration of mixed-race orphanhood takes on different narrative structures. Indeed, I argue that Roy’s search narrative is non-linear, ‘irregular’ and ‘disconnected’, as Jelinek puts it, and that Traynor’s individual exploration of selfhood necessarily involves a linear style.

The Manichean allegory that structured the British Empire as a family – with Britain as the parents and the colonies as subservient children – represented and subjected the black experience as ‘other’ within its knowledge and constructed British

cultural identity as white. In the wake of the Second World War, British national identity and gender became more connected, constructing the family around a working father, a domestic mother and children. In this family model, the mother and children symbolised the nation, which the working father must protect from outsiders.¹ Within this image of the nation, postwar migration to Britain from its colonies in Africa and the Caribbean and former colonies in the Indian sub-continent was seen as a disruption of the homology between nation and race.² At the same time, if we think of Britain as a diaspora space, where different histories and cultural identities meet and interracial relationships are formed, mixed-race children often challenge dominant ideologies of family structure. Given such constructions of family models and the fear of miscegenation, mixed-race children were more likely to enter foster care than white, black or Asian children.³ Most of the mixed-race children in foster care were children of a white mother and an African or Afro-Caribbean father.⁴ The two novelists discussed in this chapter are both children of a white mother and an African or Afro-Caribbean father. It is in light of such representations of racially constructed families, that the figure of the mixed-race orphan provokes a re-evaluation of the representation of dominant family structures.

Roy's and Traynor's novels provide literary testimonies to the socially administered practice of fostering that often seeks to replicate the conventional family

¹ Suki Ali, *Mixed-Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practices* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-64* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1993); Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1995)

² Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi, 'The 1951-1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration', in *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*, ed. by Kwesi Owusu (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 21-36.

³ Ravinder Barn, *Black Children in the Public Care System* (London: Batsford in association with British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 1993), p. 7; Ravinder Barn, 'White Mothers, Mixed Parentage-Children and Child Welfare', *British Journal of Social Work*, 29 (1999), pp. 269-284; Owen Gill and Barbara Jackson, *Adoption and Race: Black, Asian and Mixed-Race Children in White Families* (London: Batsford in association with British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 1983)

⁴ Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix, *Black, White or Mixed Race?: Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4; Barn, *Black Children in the Public Care System*, p. 32.

model along racial lines. Subject to racism in 1960s and 1970s Britain, Roy's mixed-race protagonist struggles to establish her cultural identity through family narratives that are lost with her father's death. Her search for a collective, shared cultural identity based on her father's African heritage is both complicated and enabled by her time in white foster care. Traynor's main character provides further insight into the experiences of racism coupled with sexual abuse in white foster care. In her case, the experience of foster care provokes a search for an alternative family, not based on racial affiliation, as she attempts to negotiate her cultural identity in relation to colleagues in the hospital where she works. I explore these novels as works of life writing, and investigate the correlations between mixed-race cultural identity, orphan identity and the possibilities of creating family models in life writing. The chapter focuses on the creation of family narratives and asks how do these authors employ life writing to explore their experiences of being mixed-race? And, how do they portray their experience in foster care? I argue that, through the use of life writing, these two authors establish new family patterns and create new family narratives that challenge dominant representations of family models. In this sense, the novels re-imagine the absent or lost families. Moreover, these individual mixed-race stories intervene in traditional race discourse on 'black' and 'white' identities and transform dominant ideas of national identities in the process.

In this chapter, I argue that the Roy narrates her mixed-race subjectivity into various overlapping historical narratives that challenge dominant notions of nation, history and belonging. However, I will also argue that Traynor's exploration of selfhood eschews such collective sense of cultural identity. My concerns over mixed-race identity in this chapter are guided by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe's challenge that

By virtue of lineage, those of 'mixed race' ... situate themselves within at least two specific and yet over-lapping historical narratives [and as such] their

experiences of multiple identities, which are necessarily contradictory, socioculturally constructed and essentialized, demand new paradigms for looking at citizenship and belonging.⁵

Her claim confronts conventional narratives of belonging and connects the collective histories of Britain and its colonies. It is evocative of Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identity as a 'production' which is never complete, but contingent on 'the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past'.⁶ Moreover, following on from the previous chapter, I argue that both authors challenge the notion that cultural identities are necessarily passed on through the family. My argument proceeds from Suki Ali's observation that

Transracial adoption is often bound up with concerns about 'national' and 'ethnic' identifications as it implies that black people (for example) must automatically have a *different* and bounded culture that came from different 'roots' than those of white Britons, and that this cultural knowledge is passed on through 'the family'.⁷

Her argument relates to the possibilities of passing on memories through family narratives, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, but is also relevant for narrating mixed-race orphan cultural identities through life writing. Moreover, Ali argues that the concept of 'the family' is created through everyday cultural practices and not an inherent knowledge passed on from parents. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, this involves the telling of stories and the creation of other family models through life writing.

My analysis of the complexities of narrating mixed-race and orphan identity in contemporary black British women's life writing is framed by a number of approaches. First, I will examine how people of mixed-race have been represented historically. It

⁵ Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, 'Diaspora's Daughters, Africa's Orphans?: On Lineage, Authenticity and "Mixed Race" Identity', in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. by Heidi Safia Mirza (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 127.

⁶ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 225.

⁷ Ali, *Mixed-Race, Post-Race*, p. 8.

will be discussed how fears over miscegenation, hybridity and sexuality have travelled from the late nineteenth century through the postwar years and into current debates over cultural identity.⁸ Second, drawing mainly on sociology, the centrality of race and family is considered in relation to the issue of orphans in foster care. This invites a conversation about the construction of cultural identity in and around families. Third, recent literary studies of mixed-race characters in the black diaspora and work on the figure of the orphan in postcolonial fiction will provide a model for engaging with mixed-race and orphan characters in literature.⁹ Building on such literary critical work, observations from autobiography and life writing critics will illuminate the possibilities of writing selfhood in the absence of collective family memories.

The intellectual framework for this inquiry follows on from debates around the concept of diaspora introduced in the previous chapters. This chapter extends these debates to discuss the notion of 'hybridity' and the concept's value for understanding contemporary mixed-race cultural identities. It will be shown how the term involves entering a state in which 'no single narrative holds true' and where differences within cultural identities are important.¹⁰ Such untenable narratives, argues Homi Bhabha, occur in the Third Space, where 'cultural statements and systems are constructed in [a] contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation'.¹¹ In other words, it is the space between that 'carries ... the meaning of culture' and where cultural identities emerge as unstable and fragmented.¹² At the same time, however, the actual reading anew of

⁸ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995)

⁹ Sara Salih, *Representing Mixed Race in Jamaica and England from the Abolition Era to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2011); Ginette Curry, *"Toubab La": Literary Representations of Mixed-Race Characters in the African Diaspora* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007); John McLeod, 'Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption', *Critical Survey*, 18, 2 (2006), 45-55.

¹⁰ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 27; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 53-56.

¹¹ Bhabha, p. 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

cultural identities involves, what Stuart Hall calls 'contingent and arbitrary stop[s]'.¹³

This is a strategic positioning, which makes meaning possible, where 'meanings continue to unfold'. However, in my discussion of Traynor's novel, I will interrogate the limitations of the concept.

These insights form my theoretical framework for examining Roy's and Traynor's novels as mixed-race orphan narratives. They usefully illustrate how these two mixed-race authors explore their senses of selfhood and narrate their subjectivities as relational, and how such subjective identities inflect the structures of these two novels. In order to contextualise the novels, my analysis will first briefly chart the presence of mixed-race and orphan characters in contemporary black British literature. Each section on the authors will briefly introduce biographical information before engaging critically with their novels.

Introducing Mixed-Race Identity and Orphan Identity

In the introduction of this section, I will briefly discuss how issues of hybridity and interracial relations were represented in late nineteenth century discourse, and discuss how some of these ideas are still evident in some parts of British society. I acknowledge that this discussion is necessarily selective, but it provides a useful vantage point for my inquiry.

In both novels, we find that there is an underlying fear by white men of sexual interrelations between black men and white women. These fears are invariably connected to the consolidation of the British imperial mission in the Victoria era. At the height of European colonialism in the late nineteenth century, fears over miscegenation and racial contamination dominated race discourse. The debates surrounding those fears worked mutually with the discourse of science, which attempted to prove biological

¹³ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 230.

differences between various peoples as indications of different 'races' within the human species. At the same time, however, these colonial 'contact zones', as Pratt calls them, where cultures intermingle, were also host to mixed populations where interracial relations produced mixed-race children.¹⁴ Although originally associated with the natural sciences – particularly botany and zoology – the term 'hybridity' was expanded to describe the outcome of two separate species of humans. It was feared that the hybrid outcome of interracial relations would contaminate the supposedly pure white race and its culture. However, the sexual relations between coloniser and colonised – usually male coloniser and female colonised – were inherently ambivalent. As Ronald Hyam argues, sexual dynamics were integral to the British colonial experience and yet, at the same time, sexual restraint was the official policy of the government.¹⁵

Both of the novelists discussed in this chapter were born to a white mother and a black father. The issue of gender impacts greatly on the sexual encounter between coloniser and colonised. In a metaphorical sense, argues Ania Loomba, the colonised female body symbolised the conquered land.¹⁶ Conversely, however, sexual relations between white women and black men were not accepted because it threatened the image of the purity of the nation. As Hyam suggests, the notion of sexual relations between a black man and a white woman was comparable to granting political freedom to colonised people.¹⁷ Through such representations of sexual dynamics in the nineteenth century, gender, nation and the image of the family became intricately entangled. In such representations of the family, mixed-race children threaten the seemingly homogeneous white nation.

¹⁴ Pratt, p. 6: 'I use [the term "contact zone"] to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other, and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict'.

¹⁵ Hyam, pp. 1, 56.

¹⁶ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 129.

¹⁷ Hyam, p. 56.

My analysis of how these two novelists have been produced and represented by the dominant white British population relies on conceptions of interracial relations that were still deeply ingrained in some elements of British society following the Second World War. Since the two authors under scrutiny were born in the two decades following the War, it is productive to consider the race discourse that prevailed at that time. In the postwar years, the racialised family hierarchy that was established in the late nineteenth century was disrupted by black and Asian migration into Britain. Migration into Britain challenged the image of the nation as homogeneously white, questioned notions of belonging and was seen as a national problem. As Wendy Webster puts it: 'Those who migrated to Britain after the war ... were seen as importing an alien "colour problem" into the metropolis and became a symbol of national decline'.¹⁸ The entrenchment of national borders in the postwar years also constructed two stories of family life that are relevant for my purposes. First, in masculine terms, white women were represented as fragile mothers and confined to the home. In the 1950s, Lynne Segal argues, white women were constructed as mothers in a symbiotic relationship between women, marriage and family.¹⁹ However, as Webster argues, the construction of white femininity, the nuclear family and the British nation was, in many ways, predicated on a corresponding representation of black and Asian women as dysfunctional as mothers. Second, however, subject to both patriarchy and racism, black and Asian women were often relegated to low-paying, physically heavy work, leaving little time to care for the family. In the two decades following the War, black families were often represented as dysfunctional precisely because of black women's position as workers.²⁰ Such constructions of black family life perpetuated fears of miscegenation

¹⁸ Webster, *Imagining Home*, p. xii.

¹⁹ Lynne Segal, 'A Feminist Looks at the Family', in *Understanding the Family*, ed. by John Muncie, Margaret Wetherell, Mary Langan, Rudi Dallos and Allan Cochrane (London: Sage, 1995), p. 298.

²⁰ Hazel. V. Carby, 'White Woman Listen!: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 219.

and the idea that interracial relations were unnatural and deeply problematic. As Lola Young says, in the early 1960s, the migration and the policy of integration 'was perceived as a threat to the British way of life and national character'.²¹ These insights into the representation of family models inform my understanding of how mixed-race children have been represented in dominant discourses of race. In British race discourse following the Second World War, interracial relations between black men and white women produced a number of reactions, of which three are particularly significant. First, black men were often seen as contributing to the decline of the British nation and viewed as a threat to white femininity. For instance, this is evident in Enoch Powell's 'River of Blood'-speech, in which he relates an anecdote of an elderly white pensioner being victimised and bullied by black people.²² His anecdote conjures up an image of a black immigrant threatening the tradition and stability of the nation embodied by the elderly lady. Second, white women who engaged in sexual relations with black men were constructed as either victims of black male sexuality or as incapable of establishing so-called normal family lives.²³ Third, and related to my second point, mixed-race children were frequently regarded as the unhappy outcome of an ill-fated interracial relationship between a black man and a white woman. As Tizard and Phoenix argue:

mixed-parentage people at that time [the 1940s] suffered not only from the same double stigma as people with two black parents – that of colour and low social class – but also from the additional stigma of having a mother who was considered depraved.²⁴

²¹ Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 87.

²² Enoch Powell, *Freedom and Reality* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1969), pp. 217-218.

²³ Webster, *Imagining Home*, p. 48.

²⁴ Tizard and Phoenix, p. 22.

The widespread opinion in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s that people of different races should not engage in relationships often led interracial couples to give up their children for adoption or foster care with a white family.

According to a 1961 Census, a disproportionately large number of mixed-race children were either in foster care or awaiting adoption.²⁵ In many cases, because of their working-class status and representation as dysfunctional, black, Asian or mixed-marriage families were deemed unfit to adopt or care for children from ethnic minority groups in Britain.²⁶ Consequently, black, Asian and mixed-race orphans were often sent to white foster families with a white 'mother surrogate', as Ifekwunigwe puts it.²⁷ Although both novelists explore their experience of white foster care, only Traynor's time spent there is portrayed as debilitating. Her experience relates to Ifekwunigwe's argument that, in these foster homes, 'a particular generation of *métis(se)* [Ifekwunigwe's term for mixed-race] children lived socially isolated and at times extremely emotionally abusive childhoods'.²⁸

The two novels were published in the late 1990s and, in a sense, follow on from and complement the debates over transracial adoption and placement of mixed-race children in white foster care that blossomed in the late 1980s. No doubt heightened by the emergence of black British cultural studies in the 1980s and the re-interrogation of the essential 'Black' subject, concerns over whether white foster carers could provide black or mixed-race children with a positive image of black people and the right skills to cope with racism were central to those debates. Underlying these debates were questions of nationalism, cultural identity and racial affiliation that are relevant for this

²⁵ See Table XIII in Jean Packman, *Child Care Needs and Numbers* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp. 54-55.

²⁶ Lois Raynor, *Adoption of Non-White Children* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 46.

²⁷ Jayne Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of 'Race', Nation and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 68: "'Mother surrogates" ... are specifically female and are generally the middle-aged, middle-class White English matrons who ran the all White children's homes and supervised the "civilizing mission"'.
²⁸ Ibid.

chapter because they signal the intricate connection between race and family, and question whether mixed-race children should be categorised as 'Black'.²⁹ Both novels provide interesting and complicated takes on these debates.

In the two novels, the main characters are sexually abused and subject to the legacies of sexual dynamics that, as both Young and Hyam argued, underpinned the colonial experience. While sociological work shows that being in foster care is indeed problematic for children in general, irrespective of race, there has been little critical attention to the different experiences of girls and boys in foster care. The issue of gender is important because children receive their images of gender roles from their parents and other family members. In some cases, as reported by Ifekwunigwe, sexual abuse against girls placed in foster care occurred quite frequently.³⁰ In another study, although not focusing specifically on black or mixed-race children, Morris and Wheatley report that sexual abuse against girls in foster care is most commonly perpetrated by foster brothers.³¹ This breach of trust between foster parents and foster siblings may cause sexually abused girls to question their own identity even further because it causes a break in the family narrative.

The two authors' cultural identification as mixed-race and their experiences of foster care are particularly interesting in light of the 1991 Census and the 2001 Census. The publications of *Lady Moses* and *Sister Josephine* in the late 1990s signal a shift in the cultural landscape of Britain that is reflected in the Census. While mixed-race people were omitted as an ethnic group from the 1991 Census, they were included in 2001 Census. The inclusion of this category in 2001 was based partly on the

²⁹ For a brief discussion of these debates, see Tizard and Phoenix, p. 64.

³⁰ Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings*, p. 121. See also, Charlie Owen, Sonia Jackson, Sofka Barreau and Edwina Peart, 'An Exploratory Study of Private Fostering', ed. by Thomas Coram Research Unit (Institute of Education: University of London, 2007).

³¹ Sally Morris and Helen Wheatley, *Time to Listen: The Experiences of Children in Residential and Foster Care: A ChildLine Study* (London: ChildLine, 1994), pp. 38-39, 54. See also, Mary Moss, Sarah Sharpe, Chris Fay, *Abuse in the Care System: A Pilot Study by the National Association of Young People in Care* (London: NAYPIC, 1990)

Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) recommendation that, first, ethnic monitoring must be based on self-identification and, second, that the particular experiences of mixed-race children in the care system would be highlighted.³² The inclusion of mixed-race identity in the 2001 Census and the recommendations of the CRE signal an official recognition of this particular cultural identity and the need for attention to the problems of mixed-race children in foster care. However, despite such a recognition and a surge in mixed-race literature in the 1990s, the significance of the debates outlined above has only recently been addressed by literary critics. In the next section, I will briefly discuss how literary critics have approached these issues and how their insights are useful for my purposes.

My analysis of these two novels relates to the re-interrogation of the essential 'Black' subject in the late 1980s and the emergence of an officially recognised mixed-race cultural identity in the 1990s. To date, studies of mixed-race literature have principally been subsumed under examinations of black British literature, and only recently have critics paid attention to the various ways in which mixed-race authors narrate their experiences. As my chapter will explore, there are important reasons for examining mixed-race literature in conjunction with black British literature. For example, issues of racism, hybridity and cultural identity are also of utmost significance for mixed-race authors. However, as two recent studies have also suggested, there are differences between mixed-race authors and their black British equivalents that warrant attention and inform my own analysis. In this chapter, I consider how Roy and Traynor utilise autobiographical elements to narrate their mixed-race cultural identity as a process that challenges long-established conceptions of family, race and nation. My focus is narrower than Sara Salih's recent study (2011), but her study provides a useful

³² Charlie Owen, "'Mixed Race' in Official Statistics", in *Rethinking 'Mixed Race'*, ed. by David Parker and Miri Song (London: Pluto, 2001), pp. 134-153. See also, Ceri Peach, *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census*, Vol. 2.: *The Ethnic Minority Populations of Great Britain* (London: HMSO, 1996); Peter J. Aspinall, 'The Conceptual Basis of Ethnic Group Terminology and Classifications', *Social Science and Medicine*, 45 (1997), pp. 689-698.

model for thinking about how the representation of the mixed-race figure is underpinned, not only by arbitrarily established legal acts, but also by fictions that sustain dominant race discourse. As she says, 'non-legal texts undoubtedly contribute to the creation, constitution and discipline of "the person" as a legal and an ontological entity'.³³ Extending Salih's argument, I argue that novels offer these two authors an opportunity to represent themselves as mixed-race, regardless of the official designation in the Census, and thus challenging dominant representations. Similarly, I argue that – in addition to being an officially acknowledged cultural category in the 2001 Census – the representation of mixed-race characters in literature transform the cultural make-up of Britain. In this respect, my argument also follows Ginette Curry's argument that mixed-race characters contribute to the 'deterritorialization of "Englishness"' and challenge dominant notions of belonging.³⁴ However, I argue that Roy and Traynor pursue ambition this through the form of life writing, and that the form of life writing offers these authors a suitable means of exploring and narrating their mixed-race subjectivities.

My interrogation of the figure of the orphan in these two novels relates to the debates over transracial adoption and same race foster care that emerged in the 1980s. Until recently, studies of the figure of the orphan in black and mixed-race literature have dealt mainly with Jackie Kay's fiction.³⁵ However, my argument that the figure of the orphan challenges conventional notions of the family, and that the two authors create other family models through the form of life writing draws mainly on John McLeod's recent inquiry. He argues that black British fictions of adoption offer a way

³³ Salih, p. 27.

³⁴ Curry, p. 20.

³⁵ See, for instance, Nancy K. Gish, 'Adoption, Identity, and Voice: Jackie Kay's Inventions of Self', in *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Marianne Novy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 171-91; Katharine Cockin, 'Rethinking Transracial Adoption: Reading Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*', *a/b: Autobiography Studies*, 18, 2 (2003), pp. 276-91.

of engaging critically with the dominant notions of race, nation and belonging.³⁶

McLeod borrows from Edward Said's discussion of 'filiative' – meaning biological and natural links between generations – and 'affiliative' – as a process of identification through culture – modes of belonging and argues that black British novels of adoption 'suggest new ways of thinking about personal and political human relationships which emphasise affiliative connections rather than mystical filiative bonds'.³⁷ In my analysis, I will extend McLeod's argument about filiative and affiliative modes of belonging to focus on how such experiences are explored through life writing.

The two authors use autobiographical elements in their novels in order to explore and narrate their relational subjective experiences. Their novels reveal not only the limits of memory and the notion of postmemory but also the desire to re-imagine a family that might have been. In this respect, my argument is guided by Emily Hipchen and Jill Deans, who argue that orphan life writing seeks to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction and peel 'back the layers of the social self to look for something "original"'.³⁸ In this search for something 'original', they argue, orphan life writing often takes the form of a search process, though what is found are 'ghost remnants, a road not taken, shadowy traces of memory mixed with desire'.³⁹ As explored in the previous chapters, those ghostly traces of family histories are often erased by the historical rift of diaspora, but in this case they are even further complicated by the issue of orphanhood. This understanding of the narration of orphanhood informs my analysis of Roy's novel. However, as will be demonstrated in my interrogation of Traynor's

³⁶ John McLeod, 'Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption', *Critical Survey*, 18, 2 (2006), pp. 45-55. In addition to McLeod, see also Brian Oxley's 'Orphans and Bastards in the New World Novel', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 419-430.

³⁷ McLeod, 'Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption', p. 54; Edward Said, *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983)

³⁸ Emily Hipchen and Jill Deans, 'Introduction: Adoption Life Writing: Origins and Other Ghosts', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 18, 2 (2003), p. 167.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

novel, the absence of family narratives does not necessarily lead to a search for a collective 'black' identity, but can instead involve a rejection of filiative family models.

For my analysis of Traynor's novel, I also rely on theories of the autobiographical forms of *testimonio* and the confession. 'The situation of narration in *testimonio*', argues John Beverley, 'has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself'.⁴⁰ His argument relates to the ways in which oppressed groups can give voice to their experiences. However, as will be demonstrated in my analysis, *Sister Josephine* also bears a close resemblance to the genre of confession.

'Confessional practices', argues Jeremy Tambling, 'help to create the private individual, measured by deep interiority and feelings, and by a personal history'. Such narratives make the subject 'responsible for [her] acts'.⁴¹ My analysis examines how Traynor's novel operates along a continuum between *testimonio* and confession.

Hybridity, Mixed-Race and Cultural Identity

A main thrust of my argument in this thesis is that issues of hybridity and diaspora have tended to dominate critical studies of black and Asian British literature. In this regard, I will now contend with these issues and consider how they impact on and are linked to the autobiographical nature of these novels. There is no doubt that within diaspora studies, the concept of hybridity has become a key term to describe a wide range of historical and social mixings. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is particularly pertinent in two ways. First, wrested away from its nineteenth-century scientific connotations, as I discussed earlier, the term has more recently been used to describe culturally diverse, diasporic Britain as a community that is both 'intranational and

⁴⁰ John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 32

⁴¹ Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 2.

ouernational' – with over-lapping historical narratives that reach beyond the national border.⁴² Hybridity borrows here from various historical narratives and serves to disrupt the notion of a homogeneous, national identity based on race or ethnicity and is useful for my analysis of Roy's novel. As Iain Chambers suggests, the state of hybridity produces new narratives that challenge the dominant discourse of history and knowledge.⁴³ His understanding relates to the way new and alternative family models can be imagined creatively in life writing and is useful for understanding Traynor's rejection of conventional family models. However, as I explored in Chapter 2, while this interpretation rejects essentialism and ethnic absolutism, it risks forgetting those histories that have been marginalised in the first place.

Second, therefore, for my analysis it is useful to remember that history is something. As Stuart Hall puts it: 'we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific'.⁴⁴ The different locations and histories from which we all speak are not forever deferred into oblivion so that the hybrid identity loses all meaning. Instead, as Hall claims elsewhere, cultural identity as a process must necessarily make arbitrary stops to position itself in the narratives of the past.⁴⁵ This is particularly pertinent for those histories that have been silenced by the dominant narratives of history. Understood in this sense, hybridity as a cultural identity positions itself in various contexts – it allows the author to say: 'at this moment, I am British, but I am also black' – and these self-identifications are not mutually exclusive. Homi Bhabha is instructive here: making these stops, he argues, creates a "third space" which enables the other positions to emerge'.⁴⁶ In this sense, hybrid cultural identity is not hierarchical – somehow less pure than 'black' or 'white' – but a cultural identity in

⁴² Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 25.

⁴³ Chambers, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 222.

⁴⁵ Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', in *Identity: The Real Me*, ed. by Lisa Appignanesi (London: ICA, 1987), pp. 44-46.

⁴⁶ Rutherford, p. 211.

and of itself. This 'third space', he continues, 'displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom'.⁴⁷ This understanding of cultural hybridity is useful for explaining the notion of mixed-race identity. Moreover, his theoretical insight relates to Friedman's contention that women's narratives of selfhood 'merges the shared and the unique'. In my analysis, I examine how such conceptions of hybrid identities impact on and are connected to the autobiographical nature of these two novels.

Black British Orphans: The Literary Context

In this section, I will briefly situate these two novels within a larger body of recent fictions by mixed-race authors and novels that have orphan characters, and explain how they support the larger arguments of this thesis. Roy and Traynor belong to a group of mixed-race authors that appeared on the literary scene in the late 1980s and the 1990s, and reached new heights with the popular success of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*.⁴⁸ In the same period, a growing body of black British literature that featured orphans and adoptees emerged.⁴⁹ Orphan narratives have taken a variety of forms, but for the purposes of this chapter, these may be loosely divided into two categories. First, as is the case with Roy and as often seen in adoption and orphan writing, such novels often revolve around the protagonist's search for one of or both of her birth parents.⁵⁰ In many ways, this search is comparable to Levy's quest for a collective cultural identity in *Fruit of the Lemon*. Second, as Traynor's novel demonstrates, the orphan narrative may

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

⁴⁸ Other mixed-race women authors from this period include Bernardine Evaristo, Leone Ross and Jacqueline Roy. As of 4 November 2010, *White Teeth* had sold more than 730,000 copies. Data obtained from NielsenBookScan, 4 November 2010.

⁴⁹ Jackie Kay, *The Adoption Papers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991); Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998); Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993); Buchi Emecheta, *The New Tribe* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000).

⁵⁰ Isha McKenzie-Mavinga and Thelma Perkins, *In Search of Mr McKenzie* (London: Women's Press, 1991); Charlotte Williams, *Sugar and Slate* (Aberystwyth: Planet, 2002); Yinka Sunmonu, *Cherish* (London: Mango Publishing, 2003)

involve a rejection of both foster parents and birth parents.⁵¹ In this sense, it relates to the ways in which Srivastava, Perera and McLeod narrated their subjectivities against their parents and as separate from their collective identities. However, in contrast with Srivastava's, Perera's, Levy's and McLeod's novels, in Roy's and Traynor's novels, there are no birth parents to narrate themselves against, which complicates the notion of postmemory.

My examination of *Lady Moses* alongside *Sister Josephine* also illuminates some of the changes within black and Asian British cultural production in the 1990s. Although both authors were born to a black father and a white mother and published their debut novels in the latter half of the 1990s, their ventures into literature differ widely. The different publishing venues for Roy and Traynor signal an important change in the visibility of black British literature. In terms of publishing and popular reception, Roy's literary career points to the politics of black British writing of the 1980s, whereas Traynor's debut novel is symptomatic of the change in cultural politics of the mid-1990s. Roy's first poetry collections were published by small black British and feminist publishing houses and are emblematic of the historical context, where such presses often were the only possibility for black and Asian British authors.⁵² Moreover, having lived in the United States since the early 1980s, Roy is often included in the tradition of African American authors but has recently been examined in conjunction with other black British authors.⁵³ Her inclusion in both literary traditions destabilises

⁵¹ Valerie Mason-John, *Borrowed Body* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005)

⁵² Lucinda Roy, *Wailing the Dead to Sleep* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1988); Lucinda Roy, *The Humming Birds* (Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 1995); Lucinda Roy, *The Hotel Alleluia* (London: Virago, 2000). For more on Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications and other smalls presses, see Sarah White, Roxy Harris and Sharmilla Beezmohun, *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books – Revisited: Histories, Memories, Organisation and Programmes, 1982-1995* (London: New Beacon Books, 2005)

⁵³ For Roy's categorisation as an African American writer, see Bonnie Greer, 'No Promised Land', review of *Lady Moses*, *Washington Post*, 22 March 1998. The fact that Roy's collection of poetry, *The Humming Birds* (Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 1995), and her short story, 'Seeing Things in the Dark' in *Go Girl: Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure* (Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 1999), pp. 73-77, were published by US feminist publishing house Eighth Mountain Press support such claims. For Roy's categorisation as a black British author, see Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, '(Re)Turning to

the essential category 'black British' and questions the limits of a national literature. Her novel is investigated here because a significant part of it is set in London where the main character spends her formative years – and is sent into foster care – and where the narrator reflects on her life. By contrast to Roy's publishing history, Traynor's novel was published by the established publishing house Bloomsbury as part of the award for winning the Saga Prize.⁵⁴ Although the Prize was only awarded for four years, its inception and impact are telling of the specific historical period in which these novels were published. Its controversial 'afrocentric' focus further destabilised the political signifier 'Black'.⁵⁵

A Race Apart: Lucinda Roy's Lady Moses

What are the elements of *Lady Moses* that come from life writing? In this analysis, I demonstrate how the novel employs other forms of self-representation such as diary entries, *testimonio* and fiction to interrogate and narrate the self. The use of these subgenres of life writing defy the conventions of traditional autobiography, but they become useful tools in the hands of Roy because they allow her to consider the ways in which she has been constructed and represented by dominant discourses. In particular, the employment of these other forms of self-representation in the novel enables Roy to negotiate her experiences of foster care and being mixed-race. As Roy demonstrates, the breaks and fissures of time necessitate other ways of representing the self through the use of life writing.

Africa: Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses*', in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. by Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 300-13; Chris Weedon, 'Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women's Writing', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2, 1 (2008), pp. 17-35.

⁵⁴ Responding to the dearth of black British writing, Marsha Hunt set up the Saga Prize in 1995 to promote black writing in Britain. It was awarded to the best unpublished novel by a writer born in Great Britain or The Republic of Ireland having a black African ancestor and the winner received prize money of £3000 and a book contract. Other winners included: Diran Adebayo, *Some Kind of Black* (London: Virago, 1996), Judith Bryan, *Bernard and the Cloth Monkey* (London: Flamingo, 1998), Ike Eze-anyika, *Canteen Culture* (London: Faber, 2000)

⁵⁵ For more on the Saga Prize, see Mark Stein, 'Saga Prize', in *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, ed. by Alison Donnell (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 270.

In this chapter, I examine how Roy uses autobiographical strategies to explore her hybrid identity, and I interrogate to what extent these strategies impact on the form of the novel. I will argue that the narration of her fragmented subjectivity is necessarily non-linear, 'irregular' and 'disconnected'.⁵⁶ I will focus on her experience of foster care and her narration of family in order to elicit some distinct properties of black British women's life writing. My analysis pursues the notion that the early death of her father and her subsequent placement in white foster care causes a break in the family narrative. Growing up in a predominantly white society, the loss of her father motivates the main character's search for a cultural identity based on the collective black diaspora experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration. In this sense, there are obvious parallels to both Levy's and McLeod's novels. What emerges is a hybrid cultural identity that is positioned between three overlapping historical narratives of the black diaspora. Consequently, as the narrator explores her past, the narration of her hybrid mixed-race identity is non-linear, moves between various locations and alternates between the present and the past.

Towards the end of *Lady Moses*, the narrator, Jacinta Louise Buttercup Moses, reflects on her mixed-race identity:

I hadn't thought enough about my mother's race and my own. I was mixed race; Louise Buttercup was white, my father was African. Yet I wasn't simply a bringing together of opposites. I was me. Distinct. A race apart' (p. 300).

This sentence reflects the central concerns of the novel. First, it points to the narrator's preoccupation with discovering a collective identity through her father's African heritage and, second, it signals the narrator's acknowledgment of her own mixed-race cultural identity. I argue that this in-between nature of her subjectivity is a key characteristic of the novel. While she searches for a collective identity through her

⁵⁶ Jelinek, p. 17.

father's stories, she does so only to assert her own mixed-race identity which is inevitably more individual. In light of this, it is relevant to explore in what ways Roy creates a new family model that accommodates her mixed-race identity? In what ways does her experience of foster care impact on her subjectivity? And, how does she employ the form of life writing to engage with these issues? Addressing these questions, the section first introduces Roy before exploring how and why she adopts a non-linear and fragmented strategy for narrating her experience. I will then examine a number of episodes that impact on her subjectivity as fragmented and hybrid. In particular, the chapter focuses on her narration of her experience in foster care as constitutive of her identity. I will then consider Roy's narration of her family and her mixed-race identity and, finally, examine how she employs autobiographical strategies in order to accommodate her particular experience.

Born in 1955 to Maroon artist, sculptor and writer Namba Roy and Yvonne Shelley, a white English actress, Roy grew up in Battersea, London, where most of *Lady Moses* is set. Her father descended from the Maroons, a band of free men who escaped from slavery and lived in the Cockpit County in Jamaica. Among them, the tradition of carving, and the accompanying African legends and history were passed on from generation to generation, serving as nodal points in the narrative of Roy's family.⁵⁷ His first novel, *Black Albino* (1961), is set in the eighteenth century Maroon community in the hills of Jamaica and is testament to a surviving collective, African culture in Jamaica.⁵⁸ The strong connection to Africa is also evident in Lucinda Roy's body of literature. Namba Roy joined the Merchant Navy at the outbreak of the Second World War. Due to ill health, he was discharged in 1944 in England, where he married and had three children – of whom both Lucinda and Jacqueline are authors – and stayed until his

⁵⁷ Marie Stewart, 'I Would Like to Speak of Namba Roy', *Arts Jamaica*, 3 & 4 (1985), pp. 17-23; Pamela Beshoff, 'Namba Roy: Maroon Artist and Writer', *Jamaica Journal*, 16 (1983), pp. 34-8.

⁵⁸ Namba Roy, *Black Albino* (London: New Literature, 1961). Both this novel and his second novel, *No Black Sparrows* (London: Heinemann, 1989), were published posthumously.

death in 1961.⁵⁹ After obtaining a BA from King's College, London, in 1977, Lucinda Roy went on to teach English at a convent school in Sierra Leone from 1977 to 1979, before returning to King's College, where she was awarded a postgraduate certificate of education in 1981. After her marriage to a former Peace Corps volunteer from Arkansas, United States, she enrolled at the Creative Writing programme at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, where she graduated from in 1985. Since then she has taught African and African American literature at Virginia Tech, Virginia. Her writing is informed by her stay on those three continents. As she says in 'Seeing Things in the Dark', an account of her time in Sierra Leone: 'having lived now on three continents, I am accustomed to abiding within my own difference. With my Jamaican and British heritage, I am not your typical Brit anyway'.⁶⁰ This atypical Britishness – her mixed-race identity – informs her search for her father's roots. However, it was the death of her mother in 1992 that prompted her to revisit the past: 'It always forces you, when your parents die, to re-evaluate who you are – who you are in relation to where you came from'.⁶¹ For Roy, the form of life writing allows her to re-evaluate her family narrative and cultural identity.

Similarly to McLeod's novel, the illness and subsequent death of the protagonist's mother, Louise Buttercup, launches *Lady Moses*. Travelling back to Lavender Sweep, Battersea, London from her Virginia residence, the narrator reflects on her childhood, her father's death, her mother's descent into madness and her time in foster care. The novel jumps in time between the narrator in the present and the protagonist in the past. Due to the many experiences that have positioned her within the dominant ideologies of power, Roy's sense of time and history is fragmented, and the novel is 'irregular' and

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Roy is mostly known for her children's literature but has written one novel, *The Fat Lady Sings* (London: Women's Press, 2000) for adults.

⁶⁰ Roy, 'Seeing Things in the Dark', p. 73.

⁶¹ Madelyn Rosenberg, "'When You Write a Novel, You Can Redream Your Childhood or Adulthood,'" Says Author Lucinda Roy of Blacksburg: Love Hate Laugh Forgive Overcome', *Roanoke Times*, Metro Edition, Extra, 7 February 1998, p. 1.

‘disconnected’ in order to accommodate this. In order to consider how the form of the novel is inflected by the author’s subjectivity, I will explore some of the experiences that determine her sense of selfhood in further detail now.

From the outset, Roy creates the image of a happy, idyllic family life in Battersea, London. As also seen in Levy’s novel, for instance, the issue of location is also prevalent but she draws trajectories to places elsewhere. The family narrative is disrupted by the death of her father, Simon Moses, whose stories of Africa connected Jacinta to a collective, shared experience of slavery, colonialism and migration:

from within the web of Simon’s stories, I learned about good and evil, glory and despair. I learned how to live with courage, and how to love the land we came from although I had never seen it with my own eyes. Simon’s eyes saw it for me. The voice in his stories comforted me. I could lie down in the hammock of his words and listen to Africa calling my name (p. 14).

In this episode, Roy interweaves her cultural identity with that of her father’s which signals the importance of storytelling in the passing on of memories in order to create a collective identity. In the wake of her father’s death, her mother’s grief slowly evolves into depression and Jacinta is sent into a foster home, which leads her to declare herself an ‘orphan’ (p. 86). In place of her parents, the young Jacinta struggles to create a surrogate family from Ruskin Garland, her father’s close intellectual friend, and Vera Butcher, the well-intentioned white foster mother. In order to examine Roy’s engagement with the notion of family and the handing on of memory, it is pertinent to investigate the protagonist’s relationship to these other two characters in the novel. Whereas McLeod suggests that black British fictions of adoption emphasise affiliative connections, in this case it is more appropriate to examine Roy’s novel through filiative connections – how does she explore her sense of belonging to a family?

In place of Simon Moses, Ruskin is the immediate father figure for Jacinta. Here, the power relationship between the white male adult character and the mixed-race

female child character is worth exploring. The sexual dynamics that underwrote the British Empire and continued to haunt the postwar era are embodied in Ruskin's character. Although he is Jacinta's godfather and her father's intellectual companion – which, on the surface, would suggest an intimate bond between Ruskin and Jacinta and a natural father figure – his nineteenth century views of Africans disturb Jacinta's sense of cultural identity. By contrast to his own rational, intellectual view of the world, Ruskin describes those 'tribal cultures' (p. 75) as being more 'in touch with their spirituality than western ones' (p. 75). This sentence signals one of the ways in which black people have been represented and subjected by white people. Having conducted anthropological research in Africa, Ruskin often entertains with stories of African sexuality. Relating to Young's exposition of colonialist perceptions of African women, Ruskin attributes the women of Nigeria and the Ivory Coast with unbridled sexuality: 'the women there usually went around *au naturel*' (p. 75). Similarly, in his description of African men, Ruskin attributes them with superhuman sexuality: 'Ruskin said he's been at a ceremony once in West Africa where a man in one of the secret societies had cut off his penis' (p. 76). The story leaves Jacinta's mother shocked but Ruskin continues: 'the man had disappeared into the bush and returned with his penis reattached. No scars. Nothing' (p. 76). By contrast to black female sexuality, he represents black male sexuality as deviant and threatening to the dynamics of family relations. The episode illustrates the continual legacies of late nineteenth century scientific race discourse in the postwar era, and indicates how black people have been misrepresented as 'others' throughout history. For Jacinta, Ruskin's stories of Africa provide no identification with her African heritage, but serve to destabilise her sense of selfhood. As I explored in my analysis of Levy's novel, such racist experiences place her cultural identity in a historical narrative to which she has limited access because of her father's death.

Ruskin's notion of black female sexuality – expressed through his colonialist rhetoric – threatens Jacinta's sense of selfhood when he makes sexual advances towards her. Upon entering her teenage years, Jacinta's budding adolescence is noticed: 'Ruskin smiled at me for along time, then said I was turning into a beautiful young lady and that all the men would be after me' (p. 76). Although Jacinta does not realise it at the time, the narrator notices in hindsight that it was inappropriate: 'I don't think Ruskin meant any harm. But then I was thirteen, and I knew there was a lot I was missing' (p. 76). The power relationship between them becomes even more apparent as Jacinta's mother descends into depression and madness, leaving Jacinta in foster care with Mrs Butcher, who lives down the street from the Moses'. On her way with Ruskin to the foster home, Jacinta slowly awakens to this sense of something 'missing'. While both representing and constructing female sexuality as 'other', Ruskin also desires Jacinta at the same time: 'Little girls your age usually [like nudity]. They are still pure – untouched by the perversions of a society racked by guilt. They accept the body in a way that is totally uninhibited. They know their femaleness and it thrills them' (pp. 111-2). As he starts groping her, he transgresses the boundaries of the vicarious father and daughter relationship. At first, this unsettles Jacinta but also constitutes an awakening:

When he wasn't changing gears, he'd rest his hand on my thigh. Once in a while he'd squeeze it. I tried to pretend it wasn't happening, but gradually I began to feel it. It was as if my whole body had become the area where his hand was. I didn't know whether it made me smaller or larger. I did know it made me feel guilty, something I'd escaped for a while (p. 112).

As I also explored in the previous chapter, such a destabilising event shatters Jacinta's ability to consciously recognise what happens, in Freudian terms, but the re-imagining of the event in the novel allows Roy to work through the trauma. Ruskin's sexual advances towards Jacinta are embedded in the continual legacies of colonialist race discourse that represent and produce her, firstly, as 'other' within his knowledge and,

secondly, and as a consequence thereof, as sexually available to him. Within his rhetoric, Ruskin denies Jacinta's subjectivity based on race and gender. In face of these racist events and experiences of sexual abuse, her resistance is an assertion of her subjectivity. As she narrates them in the novel, they are transformed and told from a different perspective from the perpetrator. As such, the novel challenges those dominant discourses that have mis-represented her throughout history.

If family narratives, as Ali argued, are often based on the premise that cultural practices and identities are somehow passed on from the parents, this is complicated in Roy's novel in the absence of parents. Subject to racism from Ruskin – and the Beadycap family lodging with her and her mother – Jacinta internalises her black identity and voices her resistance to living with a white foster carer. When Ruskin reminds her that she is 'half-caste' and 'mulatto' (p. 114), she replies in a self-eradicating, yet assertive, effort: 'don't call me anything' (p. 114). In this instance, she casts off any notion of family narrative.

In the absence of a collective cultural identity passed on from her father, Jacinta's subjectivity is produced and represented in colonialist terms by Ruskin. Her mother's madness and subsequent admittance to a mental institution leaves Jacinta equally without any sense of a positive white cultural identity. Consequently, during her first night in the children's home in Clapham Park, she eschews her white ancestry – and by implication, her mixed-race identity – and re-invents herself as Simone Madagascar: 'I chose Simone Madagascar because, although she wasn't me, she had enough of Simon in her name and enough of Africa to be different' (p. 108). In the novel, her relationship with Ruskin – the surrogate father figure – serves a number of purposes. First, his tales of Africa and black people's sexuality alienate Jacinta from him and serves as a critique of received notions of race and gender from family members. In turn, this leads her to abandon her white heritage and declare herself – metaphorically – an orphan of history.

Bhabha's 'third space' is instructive here. Having displaced the dominant white history that surrounds her, she embraces her father's black cultural identity in order to position her hybrid subjectivity in between her mother's white history and her father's black history. In this sense, Jacinta frustrates the dominant narratives of history and self-consciously position herself in Bhabha's 'third space'. In response to Ruskin's racism, Jacinta attempts to re-connect with her African heritage by calling herself Simone Madagascar. In this regard, it is rewarding to examine how Roy engages with her identity as an orphan and how she re-connects with her collective, shared African identity.

Jacinta spends a night in a children's home in Clapham Park before she ends up in foster care with Mrs Butcher. Although the episode where Jacinta is in foster care only takes up one chapter (Chapter 8, pp. 108-31) of the novel, it is a significant event in the formation of the main character's subjectivity and it provides an interesting insight into the state of black and mixed-race children in foster care in the 1960s. The narrator offers a vivid description of the state of her first foster home:

I spent the night in a children's home in Clapham Park. I barely said a word. No one took much notice because the place was crowded: four new arrivals in one day, they said, three of us 'coloured' children. They made me wash my hair with a lethal-smelling shampoo and comb it with a metal comb, as a precaution against lice (p. 108).

Jacinta's arrival at the first children's home is described in words that evoke an immigrant's journey to Britain. In this sense, the children's home symbolises a new world for the young protagonist – a world where she is not only cut off from her parents but also interpellated as 'coloured' – and metaphorically represents British society as a whole. The episode is significant since, because of Jacinta's mixed-race heritage, British society still subjects her to its racist procedures. It suggests that, for all the theory on diasporic and hybrid Britain, the dominant structures of power still regulate the borders

of the nation and constructs her mixed-race identity as different from the dominant cultural identity. As such, the novel contributes to the interrogation of the notion of the 'black' subject and suggests that there are reasons for considering mixed-race authors in conjunction with black authors.

However, instead of representing her experience of foster care as debilitating and problematic for her sense of selfhood, Roy paints a different picture of the main character's stay with Mrs Butcher, who 'has taken in many coloured girls and done a fine job with them' (p. 114) in 'facilities [that] weren't luxurious, [but] they were homey' (p. 116). Roy emphasises Mrs Butcher's focus on love and care rather than racial identity: 'there's no colour bar here' (p. 117), as she says. In doing so, Roy engages in the debates around special needs for mixed-race children in foster care and challenges Ifekwunigwe's claim that foster homes were often emotionally abusive environments. Instead, the main character's time in foster care with Mrs Butcher is an enabling experience that allows her to initiate a search for her collective, African cultural identity. This is evident in two ways. First, in response to Jacinta's self-declared orphanhood, Mrs Butcher instils a renewed sense of selfhood in Jacinta. Second, Mrs Butcher provides a space for Jacinta to discover her father's stories anew through storytelling.

By the time Jacinta enters the foster home, she has severed her ties to her past and erased her cultural identity: 'I don't want to-to-to be Jacinta Mo-Moses anymore!' (p. 119), to which Mrs Butcher responds, 'There, there, there Who else would you be, love, if not yourself?' (p. 119). Relating to Ali's contention that families are created through cultural practices and everyday routines, Jacinta starts helping Mrs Butcher take care of the other children and gets into a routine: 'more than anything else at that time I wanted to live within some kind of routine. In spite of her faults, Vera Butcher gave that

back to me' (p. 122). Reflecting on her experience in foster care and having developed a sense of family with Mrs Butcher, the narrator says:

From the children I learned that there were worse situations than the ones I'd know. Before Mrs Butcher's, I hadn't realized that there were tragedies more compelling than my own. The stories I told the children brought Simon back. For some reason, I could tell them better when I wasn't living in the house where he wrote them. I could make them mine in a more profound way. Gradually I began to realize that my mother's house on Lavender Sweep held me in like a corset. It was there that Simon's ghost lived It was there that Louise had gone mad. Alfred's presence was not enough to redeem the house. 'It was a palace of doom,' I wrote in my diary one day, in spite of my vows never to write again (p. 124).

Her stay in foster care with Mrs Butcher marks a new beginning for Jacinta: 'At Mrs Butcher's I didn't have to be anyone but Jacinta Louise Buttercup Moses. That was who I was and it was enough' (p. 124). Her experience of foster care with Mrs Butcher enables Jacinta to re-connect with her father's African cultural identity through storytelling. The intricate connections between family history, storytelling, orphanhood and life writing will be explored in detail below. Before examining this, however, it is pertinent to look at how Roy narrates her mixed-race identity in the novel.

In various ways, Roy narrates her sense of cultural identity into several overlapping historical narratives. In doing so, she self-consciously positions her mixed-race cultural identity as an individual identity that emerges from in-between other cultural identities. This in-betweenness accounts for her sense of subjectivity and inflects the form of the novel in certain ways.

Similarly to Levy's main character, Roy's protagonist undertakes a journey through the black diaspora in the United States to find family members in Africa. Doing so, Roy charts another history of family relations within the collective experiences of slavery, colonialism and migration that connect black people. These collective experiences do not run parallel to some dominant white history but are integral to the varied histories of Britain, the United States and Africa. Eventually, this means coming

to terms with the overlapping historical narratives, as Ifekwunigwe argues.⁶² In weaving these histories together, Roy deconstructs dominant narratives that seek to uphold the homology between race and nation as they were constructed in the immediate postwar years.

Relating to Hall's two understandings of cultural identity – as explored in detail in the previous chapter – Roy's protagonist finds a sense of a shared, collective history with African Americans and yet is equally aware of her British heritage. She positions herself in between, in the third space, in Bhabha's words. Now living in the United States with her white husband, Emmanuel Fox III, Jacinta identifies with an African American basketball player. While this is evidence of the interconnectedness between black people in the diaspora in the West Jacinta finds equally that she is considered British in the United States. Pondering the difference between African Americans and black Britons, she says:

The African Americans in [The United States] fascinated me because they took this land as their own. Black Britons didn't do that in the same way. We were always aliens; in the corner of our eyes was the fear of repatriation. I wanted to find a home like the Africa of Simon's stories – a place where no one would question my right to put down roots (p. 216).

On one level, this signifies that black people in the West share a certain history that serves as nodal points in the narrative of black people. It is a matter of creating a collective 'Black' identity in the struggle for access to representation. On another level, however, the very differences between the black diasporas in Britain and the United States deconstruct the supposed connections between race and nation. As such, her mixed-race background complicates the idea that she should necessarily identify with an essential 'Black' identity, waiting to be found in Africa. At various points, she makes

⁶² Ifekwunigwe, 'Diaspora's Daughters, Africa's Orphans?', p. 127.

arbitrary stops and positions herself in different narratives of the past. This positioning accounts for the aesthetics of her narrative.

Failing to find a sense of cultural identity in the United States, the main character's search for her father's stories brings her to an unnamed West African country where she attempts to find family members. While Roy's protagonist undertakes this journey in order to connect with her blackness, she discovers that she is as much a product of her white mother and Britain. As she negotiates her identity in relation to the singer Esther Cole and John Turay, with whom she falls in love, she discovers members of her father's family but – more importantly – realises that she is not considered black in Africa. As the women in the market say: 'Black American, white American ... what is different?' (p. 268). Echoing her autobiographical short story 'Seeing Things in the Dark', Jacinta realises that, despite her father's African heritage, she is as much white British as she is black British. This is a conscious self-identification that upsets traditional notions of whiteness as well as the idea of an essential 'Black' identity. Her mixed-race identity does not dispute these histories but *displaces* their authority, as Bhabha says, to establish a new culturally recognisable identity. In this sense, Roy's novel speaks directly to the debates surrounding the political acknowledgment of mixed race.

In this final section, I turn to consider how these episodes and formation of subjectivity impact on Roy's use of autobiographical strategies. From the outset, Roy complicates the relation between the author, the narrator and the protagonist. In the novel, the narrator travels back to London to attend her mother's funeral in the present. This forces her to re-evaluate her family relations and her childhood in the past. Setting up this relationship allows Roy to 'dispute and revise the inherited past', as Watson

says, through the form of life writing.⁶³ However, what emerges is not just a history of her family narrative, but a revised version with 'shadowy traces of memory mixed with desire', in Hipchen and Deans' words.⁶⁴ In less obvious ways, it suggests that it is actually through the loss of her white ancestry that she searches for her black ancestry as well. The creation of a family narrative through the practice of writing, therefore, necessarily entails a blurring of fact and fiction and a revision of different historical moments. Indeed, in order to accommodate such fragmented sense of history, Roy adopts a non-linear approach where her chapters are often 'disconnected' and irregular.⁶⁵

One of those moments, her time in foster care, is particularly illustrative in describing the intricate connections between cultural identity, family narrative and life writing. Having grown up writing a journal and listening to her father's stories of Africa, she stops writing once admitted into foster care. However, encouraged by Mrs Butcher, she starts telling stories of Africa – leaning on her father's stories, but also elaborating them – to the other children in foster care:

When I spoke the words, something strange happened. It was as if it wasn't me talking at all, but my father. My mouth moved but it was his voice that came out I made parts of the stories up. They became mine too Simon's stories had lacked romance. I shoved it into his plots relentlessly (pp. 122-3).

Instead of merely repeating her father's stories, this episode stresses the performative aspect of life writing and connects her to his family narrative. Throughout the novel, several episodes relate how the main character charts her self-development through writing journals and diaries. While this aspect in many ways parallels Srivastava's journey towards becoming a writer, in *Lady Moses*, these instances serve to connect the

⁶³ Julia Watson, 'Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree', in *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 318.

⁶⁴ Hipchen and Deans, p. 167.

⁶⁵ Jelinek, p. 17.

practices of writing and the creation of a family. In the continuum between autobiography and fiction, these episodes work to assert Roy's agency into certain family narratives through life writing. This fictionalisation of her childhood and re-imagining of a new family model allows Roy to engage with the overlapping histories of her white mother's British heritage and her father's African history. In this process, she confronts those dominant discourses of representation that constructed the family around race and dictated the mixed-race experience as incommensurable with Britishness. What emerges in Roy's novel is a hybrid diaspora space in which the main character's search for her father's African roots is an indication of her mixed-race identity. It is a careful positioning within certain historical narratives through the form of life writing.

Half-Caste, Half-Done or Brown Really: Joanna Traynor's Sister Josephine

What are the key characteristics of Traynor's *Sister Josephine* that derive from life writing? The novel negotiates the inherent difficulty in capturing the self by employing other forms of self-representation such as *testimonio* and confession. While the novel allows Traynor to explore and represent her own subjective experience of foster care and orphanhood, it is clear that such experiences cannot be represented adequately through conventional autobiography. Instead, by incorporating other forms of self-representation into her novel, this novel explores the limits of autobiography as an appropriate form of self-representation. Moreover, the fluidity of life writing becomes a powerful tool for Traynor to assert her individual subjectivity in relation to a collective 'Black' experience.

In the early pages of *Sister Josephine*, while in foster care with the Wallace family, the narrator, Josie Milner (or Josephine O'Leary, as she is later to discover is her birth name), asks her foster sister: 'Eh, why is it you're brown and I'm brown and

we've both been rescued and on telly I see pictures of starving brown babies in Africa and well ... why do brown people always need rescuing?' (p. 29). Her question bears direct relation to the over-representation of black and mixed-race children in foster homes. Moreover, it raises broader questions regarding postcolonial structures of power that represent – in this case, on the telly – black people in need of help from the developed West and the continual legacies of colonialism. In this sense, black and mixed-race children are construed outside the limits of the British nation. However, in a later episode, during one of her many escapes from foster care, the now teenaged Josie meets Matthew, a Nigerian prince, and ponders her difference from him:

He was proper black. A lot of people call me black but I'm brown really. Sometimes I was called coloured like God had to use of those brown crayons on someone. The only time I used dark-brown crayons was for colouring in the tree trunks. Sometimes I was called half-caste. Half-done (pp. 71-2).

In this instance, Josie self-consciously distances herself from the collective black African identity that Matthew supposedly embodies. These episodes reflect some of the central concerns of this chapter: namely, that the legacies of colonialism continue to haunt the experience of foster care and impose a sense of family structure on the individual based on race and, furthermore, that mixed-race identity, as a self-conscious cultural identity, demands more attention if we are to fully understand the complexities of this novel.

Examining *Sister Josephine* alongside Roy's novel expands our understanding of the relations between the narration of family, cultural identity and life writing. Her portrait of the experience of white foster care in the 1960s and 1970s reveals another layer of the socially administered practice of fostering that demands critical attention. My examination of Traynor's text asks, in what ways does the experience of foster care impact on the main character's sense of family and belonging? How does her mixed-

race heritage influence her position within the narratives of the nation? How does she create alternative family models? And, in what ways does she employ autobiographical strategies to explore and narrate her particular experience? Before engaging with these questions, a brief introduction of Traynor will shed further light on this novel as a form of life writing. My analysis will then examine her narration of a series of racist experiences and sexual assaults that are telling, not only of the conditions of mixed-race girls in foster care, but of the continual legacies of colonialism that lie beneath such acts. I will interrogate how these instances inflect her sense of selfhood and how they impact on the main character's creation of an alternative family model in the hospital system in the second part of the novel. In the final part of this analysis, I will investigate how she employs autobiographical elements in order to re-imagine an alternative family model. I will argue that, in spite of her mixed-race identity, Traynor does not position her subjectivity into various overlapping historical narratives. Consequently, while her sense of selfhood is relational and fragmented, she does not explore her individual subjectivity in relation to a wider collective 'black' identity, but instead uses a chronological and progressive mode of narration that accommodates her sense of selfhood in Britain.

Born in 1960 in London to a Nigerian father and a mother of Irish descent, Joanna Traynor grew up in foster care with two different white English families in the north of England and attended a Catholic School. After training as a nurse, Traynor graduated with a degree in psychology from Plymouth Polytechnic, before moving on to a clerical job at the *Guardian* and later working as an information manager at the University of Plymouth. She discovered having a talent for writing in primary school but did not follow this path until she discovered the call for submissions for the newly established Saga Prize in the mid-1990s. She admits to the autobiographical nature of her first novel: 'I used my own childhood as a canvas and painted things on it', she says in one

interview, and in another: 'My life was like I describe in *Sister Josephine*, but probably more so'.⁶⁶ She did not meet her birth mother until the mid-1980s and did not search for her father until the late 1990s, after the publication of *Sister Josephine*. Without reading such information back into the novel as verifiable fact, it may usefully serve to contextualise the emergence of mixed-race orphan writing in the 1990s.

Like many other Nigerians, Traynor's father studied in Britain in the late 1950s when he met Traynor's mother, a white Englishwoman of Irish descent. After graduation, Traynor's father went back to Nigeria and her mother gave up Joanna because of pressure from her parents.⁶⁷ As June Ellis has shown, this pattern was quite common and directly linked to Britain's imperial policy in the colonies and postcolonial migration patterns to Britain.⁶⁸ Moreover, as Moira J. Maguire claims, the practice of Irish women giving up their mixed-race children was frequent in that period.⁶⁹ In this light, Traynor's mixed-race orphan background is a product of a specific historical period in Britain when postwar migration altered the supposedly homogeneous notion of Britain as a white nation.

Traynor's novel juxtaposes two settings – the two foster homes of her childhood and her experience of the British hospital system – which are both microcosms of British society and families. As the main character moves from one artificial family to another, she negotiates her mixed-race identity within those settings. In relation to the debates on same-race placement and whether a white foster family can provide proper care for a black or mixed-race child, this first section of my analysis considers the main character's relationship to the foster parents and the other foster children. Moreover, I

⁶⁶ 'The Life of a Prize-Winning Author Has Its Ups and Downs', *PR Newswire Europe*, Features, 23 October 1996; Isabel Stott, 'Seeking Divine Inspiration: Prize-Winning Novelist Joanna Traynor Talks About Her Search for Her Roots', *Evening Herald* (Plymouth), Supplement: The Weekend, 12 September 1998, p. 24.

⁶⁷ Joanna Traynor, 'I was the only black person I'd ever met or seen. I am but an entry in my mother's diary of shame', *The Times*, Features, 16 September 2000, EbscoHost [Accessed 07 April 2008]

⁶⁸ June Ellis, 'Introduction', in *West African Families in Britain: A Meeting of Two Cultures* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 1-13.

⁶⁹ Moira J. Maguire, 'Foreign Adoptions and the Evolution of Irish Adoption Policy, 1945-52', *Journal of Social History*, 36, 2 (2002), pp. 387-404.

will consider how the continual legacies of colonialism impact on these debates as they are represented in the novel. I will begin by considering how she attempts to establish her subjectivity as relational along filiative modes of belonging.⁷⁰

From the beginning of the novel, Josie seeks to establish a family model along filiative patterns. In this sense, the protagonist longs for the same sense of biological family links that Roy explored in her novel. However, although she refers to her foster parents, the Milners, as ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ and her fellow foster siblings as brothers and sisters – revealing her need for a family – she is aware from early on that she is not adopted – which would indicate a more permanent place within a family – but merely in foster care. She attempts to narrate her identity into the master narratives of the British canon of Dickens when she asks her foster mother: ‘Was I found on a doorstep or somat like that – in a shoebox with a Paddington Bear message stuck on me?’ (p. 44). In response, and dispelling Josie’s desire to belong to a family, her foster mother dismisses her: ‘You were taken to the Nazareth House and left there. That’s all I know. Don’t be sarcastic’ (p. 44). The socially administered practice of taking in mixed-race children because of pity in the 1950s and 1960s creates a distance between Josie and her foster parents. Moreover, it suggests that, because of her mixed-race, she is excluded from the national narrative, symbolised by canonical literature.

From the first page of the novel, Traynor exposes the limits of the racially constructed family as well as the prevailing prejudices against black youths. As examined in Chapter 1, certain areas of inner-cities were associated with black crime in the 1970s, suggesting explicit links between crime, race and location. In *Sister Josephine*, after nine-year-old Josie is caught shoplifting, a policewoman asks her: ‘Are your mam and dad West Indians?’ (p. 3). Pondering the difference between West Indians, Native Americans and her own brown skin colour, she points to the

⁷⁰ McLeod, ‘Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption’, p. 54.

policewoman's white hand and answers: 'No. they're more like cowboys – like you' (p. 3). Aside from the institutional racism underlying the policewoman's question, it problematises the relations between race and family that Suki Ali points to. Moreover, it suggests that certain traits – like crime – are passed on from parents to children. Josie's position within the foster home upsets such dominant constructions of race as linked with crime. On the other hand, however, Josie is well aware of her difference from her foster parents: 'She was quite old compared to other mums. Over fifty at least. Too old and orange to be my real mum anyway' (p. 6), she says of her foster mother. Well aware of this difference, she constructs another family when confronted with her ancestry by a black man: 'I usually told people that I was from the Caribbean. That gave them a bit of a holiday' (p. 73). Throughout the novel, Traynor's main character's relation to her foster parents varies between wanting to belong to a family and, at the same time, knowing that because of her skin colour, she does not belong. Conversely, her foster parents also make it clear that they are not family. This is even more evident in her relation to the other children in the foster home and is worth examining further here. Although she establishes her subjectivity as relational – as is often found in women's life writing – this relational identity is debilitating and not enabling for her sense of belonging within the narratives of the past.

While Josie's relationship with her foster parents is marked by the climate of racism prevalent in the 1970s, as explained well by Webster, her relationship with her foster siblings cannot easily be explained in those terms. Instead, it is more productive to examine how Traynor engages with the politics of race and racism prevalent in the 1970s. In this regard, Traynor's novel bears many similarities to *Fruit of the Lemon*, which also focused on the experiences of racism in that period.

The disparity between her relationship with her foster parents and that of her foster siblings is evident in Josie's relationship with Gary. While they are unable to

provide proper skills for coping with racism for Josie, the foster parents allow Gary to gain a sense of collective pride and identity when he joins the local skinhead gang. Traynor portrays this in interesting ways. Obliging Gary's wish for the skinhead look of the day, the foster mother supplies him with the standard uniform: 'crombie jacket and two Ben Sherman shirts. His uniform. He wore two-tone trousers that looked green or blue depending on where you stood.' (pp. 29-30). Although Traynor offers a satirical description of the local skinhead gang, The Ridgehill Skinheads, whose 'clomping great bovver boots marched the streets of the estate singing songs of hate in new deep voices that still smacked of childhood' (p. 30), she also offers a critique of the foster mother's inability to understand the implications of allowing Gary to become a skinhead: 'Mum thought it was the fashion' (p. 30). The whole scene is narrated with child-like innocence, which indicates the protagonist's inability to consciously understand the effects of racism: 'I couldn't understand why all these boys hated us so much because we were nignogs. After all, we were the only ones for miles around and ... well ... with there being so many of *them*, it seemed like overkill to say the least' (p. 30). By setting up this narratological distance between the protagonist and the narrator, Traynor is able to work through, in Freudian terms, the experiences of racism in the present. In several instances, as he grows older, Gary's childhood taunts turn into racist violent abuse. As a microcosm of British society, Traynor's portrayal of the racism experienced in foster care is a critique of the continual legacies of colonialism that prevailed in the 1970s. With no intervention from the foster parents and no skills to cope with racism, she is dependent on her other foster brother, Martin, for protection.

As we saw earlier, sexual abuse was not uncommon in foster care homes in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷¹ Such experiences break the traditional family model of the

⁷¹ Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings*, p. 121; Morris and Wheatley, pp. 38-39, 54; Moss, Sharpe and Fay.

protective father and the fragile mother and children. Moreover, it challenges perceptions of what kind of family stories are passed on from generation to generation. In this section, I want to examine how these experiences impact on her subjectivity. The main character is not only subject to violent and racist abuse by her foster brother but also caught in a sexual exploitative relationship with her other foster brother, Martin. Josie is first raped at age twelve. In return for protection against Gary's violent assaults, Martin systematically rapes Josie during his period in foster care: 'He never raised his voice. He never beat me up. He kept Gary off me' (p. 20). Unlike what we saw in Roy's novel, the sexual assaults cannot be easily explained as a colonial legacy of white male desire for a black woman. However, in a similar manner to Ruskin's perpetrations, the supposed trust between family members is betrayed by these sexual assaults. This is experienced in two ways. First, she is unable to understand the implications and finds comfort in Martin's advances: 'It was still comfy. I knew he was being rude. I acted like nothing was wrong. I liked the feel of his hands. They were warm and soft. They felt safe' (p. 17). As she becomes aware of her own budding sexuality and is taught sex education in school, Josie is raped by Martin. Still, it leaves her confused: '... I didn't know what was going on' (p. 55). Second, his sexual abuse of Josie is possible because she is not given the proper care by the foster parents. Indeed, Martin threatens her to keep it a secret, informing her that if she tells anyone, she will be sent off to another foster home: 'Don't tell anyone at school. Don't breathe a word of it to anyone – anywhere. You know where you'll go if you do, don't yer?' (p. 20). For fear of losing whatever little family she has in the foster home, she remains silent and ashamed and internalises these sexual assaults. Moreover, the trauma of rape does not register fully with Josie. She represses it and is unable to give voice to this experience: 'I wanted to tell. But I couldn't. I was just twelve. How could I tell after all that time?' (p. 57). As we saw in the previous chapter, the belated experiences of traumatic events must be re-

imagined in the present in order to make sense. The narration of the episode here is the conscious re-imagining of the trauma in the present.

Although Josie's subjectivity is portrayed as relational, the creation of a family relationship with Martin involves an exploitative trade-off in which she must endure sexual assault in return for protection against Gary's racism and the slightest fragment of a stable family. This portrayal of the abusive environment in a 1970s foster home offers a critique of the dominant structures of family life that such institutions are supposed to replicate. In Josie's relation to both Gary and Martin, the foster parents are oblivious to the abusive and exploitative experiences and are unable to provide the right skills for coping with racism and sexual abuse. Consequently, Josie's attempt to forge a collective identity based on racial affiliation is futile.

By contrast to the destabilising relationships Josie has with her foster brothers, the newly arrived black girl, Bernadette, offers, at first, a sense of racial and gender identification for her. Upon learning that Bernadette is unaware of her own parental heritage, Josie entertains the idea that they are indeed related: 'Maybe we're *real* sisters' (p. 29). Her hope relates not only to Josie's need for a family but is indicative of the notion of the racially constructed family model. Although Bernadette quickly dismisses the idea, she does provide a positive image of black women for Josie: 'Her skin warm coffee, milky rich. A goddess. Bernadette breathed smiles of small white crystal sugar lumps. Joy' (p. 23). However, confirming the dominant structures of power that represent black people as 'other' within their knowledge – those 'brown people [that] always need rescuing' (p. 29) – Bernadette says: 'Coz people don't like brown people' (p. 29). Bernadette has internalised the negative construction of black people and her comment dispels the idea of an affiliative relation between them based on the shared 'Black' identity. In this case, Traynor challenges the notion of an essential 'Black' British history and corresponding literature.

Until the arrival of Bernadette, Josie is the only girl in the foster home. She receives little information about female subjectivity or gender construction from her foster mother: 'Mum 'asn't got any [breasts]. She wears a vest like me' (p. 26). After seeing Bernadette's naked body, Josie awakens to a sense of her own budding sexuality. However, as with her internalisation of the ways in which black people have been represented as 'other' within their knowledge, Bernadette has internalised the male gaze that construct women as sexually available to men's desire: 'Men like big tits' (p. 29). Given such images of gender structures, Josie has no positive sense of her female identity and no response to Martin's sexual abuse.

In the foster home, Josie is constructed through various destabilising experiences of racism and sexual abuse. As a microcosm of society as a whole, the dominant structures of power that regulate notions of belonging to the nation and the family are repeated in the foster home. Whereas Roy's experience of foster care enabled her to search for a collective identity through her father's heritage, Traynor's experience leads her to reject the idea of a filiative family. Given this rejection, it is productive to examine how Traynor constructs the main character's notion of family after leaving the foster care system.

For Traynor, the narration of alternative family models involves adopting a linear approach. As we saw in Chapter 1, the linear mode of narration offers the author an opportunity to assert her sense of selfhood into the mainstream. In similar ways, Traynor's narration of her affiliative family model necessarily involves a chronological form. In this sense, Traynor uses the linear form to impose a sense of order on her experience. As she narrates her time in the nursing school from initiation to graduation, Josie asserts her agency through the form of life writing.

After leaving the Milner family, Josie is sent into foster care with the Wallace family who coerce her to go to nursing school. In many ways, Traynor's description of

the hospital system – with the racial hierarchy between the nurses and the sexual hierarchy between the nurses and the doctors – mirrors that of the foster home. Whereas Josie's longing for a family in the foster home could be explored through a desire for a filiative model of family, she considers that part of her life behind her: 'After the door on my history closed leaving me rattling around in my future, I paused for a breath' (p. 97). In the hospital system she explores her sense of selfhood in relation to her colleagues, the doctors and nurses. In this regard, it is useful to apply McLeod's idea of affiliative modes of belonging.

Upon her arrival and registration, Josie is given her birth certificate and the name of her mother, but not her father. She is now Josephine O'Leary – a mixed-race child of an unnamed black father and an Irish mother. The episode relates to the history of African students coming to Britain for education in the postwar years, as Ellis has shown, and the practice of Irish women giving up their illegitimate children for adoption or fostering, as Maguire has shown. The racist legacies of colonialism that forced such interracial couples to give up their children continue to haunt the 1970s. This is evident in Josie's relationship with the other nurses.

Whereas she was unable to create a filiative model of family life in the foster home, she attempts to form alternative connections – and thus another family model – with her colleagues in the hospital. However, despite her mixed-race identity, Josie is still subject to racist abuse by some of her fellow nurse trainees. Complicating the issues of race and gender, Traynor shows that racism cuts across gender lines: 'I never associated the National Front with women, with nurses. They were skinheads to me. Bovver boys and yobbos. Yobbos like Gary' (p. 144). In this episode, Traynor challenges conventional notions of the relations between the nation and gender. The protection of the nation from black and Asian migration to Britain is no longer portrayed simply as a masculine issue here. In the 1970s, nationalism and racism went

hand in hand across gender lines, highlighting the limits of the women's movement. Her portrayal of the racism in the hospital system complicates McLeod's idea that black British orphans establish affiliative connections rather than 'mystical filiative bonds'.⁷²

Drawing comparisons to the images of female sexuality she received from Bernadette in the foster home, Josie makes herself sexually available to the doctors in the hospital. In doing so, she enters a sexual hierarchy that harks back to the colonial era where the black female body symbolised the conquered land, as Loomba proposed, and the interracial relations were governed by the white male desire of the black woman, as Hyam and Young showed. Having internalised the negative image of black people she received from the foster home, Josie is convinced that doctors are not interested in her. For the doctors in the hospital, however, having sex with Josie constitutes an act of power over her. Whereas the almost unattainable Dr Fox is kind towards her, she is also raped by another doctor, Arnie. By contrast to her experience of rape in the foster home, there is no sense of comfort for her in this transgressive act. She becomes pregnant but decides to have an abortion. This is significant in three ways. First, in what can be considered an act of female agency, the right to abortion signifies the right to control her own fate. As such, it constitutes an important part of Josie's subjectivity. Second, the abortion constitutes a break in the family narrative. In this sense, Josie determines which family narrative she wants to pass on and how she creates a family. Third, having an abortion offers her an opportunity to critique her own situation. By contrast to the Catholic doctrine that forced her mother to have Josie and give her up for fostering, Josie's decision to abort critiques such conventional family models. It implies that Josie does not want to subject her illegitimate child to the same upbringing in foster homes that she has had.

⁷² McLeod, 'Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption', p. 54.

Ultimately, her decision to have an abortion also relates to her own mixed-race identity. In the absence of parents and a sense of cultural identity based on a shared, collective memory, Josie is subject to the same racist legacies of colonialism that black people were in the 1970s. By having an abortion, she rejects the notion that mixed-race people are less subject than black people to racism in Britain. Indeed, the issue of mixed-race identity is remarkably absent from Traynor's novel and in several instances she calls herself 'Black'. It is only through her meeting with Matthew – or Taiwo, as his Nigerian name is – that she self-consciously identifies as mixed-race. Their meeting is significant for three reasons. First, in her initial description of him, it is evident that Josie has internalised colonial images of black people that she was taught in school:

this man was so dark brown he was black. Shiny black. I imagined the early adventurers bumping into such black people in the jungles. Coming back to England waving their pink hands in the air, their noses red with burst blood vessels against faces white as sheets, scurried and pock-marked. I saw their toothless jowls stretching from ear to ear as they charged into bars and taverns. Giving out descriptions of black fiends in dark jungles with wild white eyes and legs as long as oars. Monsters. I could understand them thinking that. Looking at this man. This man was a monster (p. 72).

Her first impression of him echoes the scientific race discourse of the nineteenth century that was central to the British colonial experience, as both Hyam and Young have shown. It is evidence of the longevity and dominance of the colonial legacy in the twentieth century. Second, she posits herself as different from him – 'He was proper black. A lot of people call me black but I'm brown really' (p. 71) – and has no positive images of Africa. By contrast to Ifekwunigwe's argument that mixed-race people situate themselves within 'at least two specific and yet over-lapping historical narratives', there are no overlapping historical narratives to situate her cultural identity within for Josie.⁷³ Through him, however, she receives alternative stories of Africa and is for the first time

⁷³ Ifekwunigwe, 'Diaspora's Daughters, Africa's Orphans?', p. 127.

able to create her cultural identity as part of a family: 'The people walked past us and thought we were family' (p. 81). Third, in this regard, the notion of the hybrid nature of mixed-race people has its limits. One on the hand, it usefully describes how the main character's mixed-race background is a specific product of the overlapping histories of Britain and its colonies. Mixed-race narratives, in this sense, frustrate those dominant narratives that construct the black experience as external to British history and contribute to the deterritorialisation of Britishness, as Curry argues.⁷⁴ On the other hand, however, because of Josie's orphan background she has no awareness of these overlapping historical narratives that constitute the notion of multicultural Britain as a hybrid diaspora space. Moreover, mixed-race people are often positioned as black in dominant discourses, so the notion of hybridity is – in this case – limited because of external objectification from dominant structures of power. Furthermore, in this case, Josie's mixed-race and orphan identity challenge the usefulness of the concept of hybridity. Whereas both Levy's and Roy's protagonists search for their collective roots in the past, Traynor's main character remains focused on the present. In this regard, her novel resembles Srivastava's and Perera's novels, in which the main characters also remained solely focused on their own individual experience of growing up in Britain.

While Traynor paints a grim picture of the state of foster homes in 1970s Britain, she brushes aside any wish for sympathy by portraying Josie as flawed. In this sense, the novel is less a *testimonio*, which in an autoethnographical way testifies to a group's oppression in order to claim a sense of agency, but more in the vein of a confession, which invites the reader to judge and absolve the author's experience.⁷⁵ Traynor's novel negotiates the burden of representing the collective oppressive experience of foster care while at the same time emerging as a personal narrative in which she takes responsibility for her own acts.

⁷⁴ Curry, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Beverley, p. 32; Tambling, p. 2.

Although the novel does not take the form of a search process, as we saw in Roy's case, what is found are still 'ghost remnants, a road not taken, shadowy traces of memory mixed with desire', as Hipchen and Dean argue.⁷⁶ In this sense, Traynor confesses that if she had behaved better, her life may have turned out differently. Moreover, as with Levy and McLeod, the use of autobiographical elements and strategies offer Traynor a possibility of exploring and working through those traumatic experiences of racism and sexual abuse. In exploring those experiences, she confronts the legacies of colonialism that prevailed in these foster homes in the form of racism and produces a counter-narrative to those stories. Furthermore, in exposing the intimate and exploitative links between racism and sexual abuse, she questions the conventional model of family life that the foster home is supposed to reproduce. By contrast to Ali's observation that black and mixed-race children in foster care is bound up with concerns over histories being passed on from black parents, Traynor's novel challenges the idea that the cultural knowledge passed on from foster parents is necessarily enabling for her cultural identity.

Through the form of life writing, Traynor re-imagines her subjectivity into the various historical narratives of the past that make up diasporic Britain, as Hall says. Whereas the main character's experience of diaspora is limited in the novel, the text itself constitutes a critical comment on the legacies of colonialism that administer the nation as a family of white people. She revisits those histories that marginalised her subjectivity through racism and sexual abuse and, in doing so, contribute to the process of deterritorialising Britishness.

Conclusion

⁷⁶ Hipchen and Deans, p. 167.

The exploration of mixed-race orphan characters in *Lady Moses* and *Sister Josephine* provides a deeper understanding of some of the key characteristics of black British women's life writing. In different ways, these two novels are concerned with the experience of mixed-race characters in the British foster care system and the impact of that experience on their sense of selfhood. The two socially constructed categories 'mixed-race' and 'orphan' both confront the dominant ideologies of family models that have travelled via nineteenth-century race discourse to the linking of nation and gender in the postwar years. In this way, through these novels, these two authors are committed to exploring the various ways in which they have been represented as 'others' and challenging them by narrating their own subjectivities.

Furthermore, in engaging directly with the social practice of fostering in the 1960s and 1970s, Roy and Traynor distinguish themselves from the literary concerns of an earlier generation of black British authors. Moreover, both authors are particularly concerned with the gendered experience of growing up in foster care. Their stories of sexual exploitation are particular to women's writing and set them apart from their male mixed-race orphan writers. For Roy, the narration of her experience of foster care involves a confrontation with the ghostly remnants of her past. Taking the form of a non-chronological and disconnected search narrative, her story situates her within three overlapping historical narratives that are part and parcel of contemporary British history. In Traynor's case, the recreation of her time in foster care allows her to confront the notion of inherited cultural knowledge from foster parents and challenge notions of an essential British identity based on racial affiliation. The exploration and narration of her subjectivity involves a linear approach that accommodates her sense of place in British society. In both novels, the form of life writing is used to create alternative family models that assert their cultural identity and position them within the historical narratives of the past and present.

In each their own way, these two authors incorporate other elements in their novels that defy traditional autobiography conventions. In *Lady Moses*, Roy uses diary entries, stories from her father and dream sequences to explore and represent her subjectivity. Moreover, the non-chronological style reflects the inherent difficulties in remembering past experiences. At the same time, however, the novel uses many of the same techniques as autobiography, which allows the author to reflect on the ways in which she has been constructed and represented by dominant discourses of race, gender and cultural identity. In *Sister Josephine*, Traynor employs *testimonio* to both bear witness to the atrocities committed against her in foster care. However, rather than representing herself as a victim, she employs the mode of confession to narrate a more nuanced image of herself. These elements of her novel defy the conventions of autobiography but embrace the openness of life writing. In veering away from the traditional form of autobiography, but employing other styles and subgenres in their novels, life writing becomes a useful tool to respond to the ways in which issues of hybridity, mixed-race and orphanhood have impacted on their subjectivities.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have carried out a comparative analysis of six post-1990s black and Asian British women novelists, Shyama Perera, Atima Srivastava, Andrea Levy, Jenny McLeod, Lucinda Roy and Joanna Traynor, and examined how these authors employ autobiographical strategies associated with varieties of life writing in their novels. Whereas critical discussions of these novels to date have largely focused on questions of diaspora, hybridity and cultural identity, I have deepened these broad approaches by examining how these authors have been able to better explore and represent these issues through employing the genre of life writing as a frame for their individual novels. Specifically, I have identified how life writing offers female black and Asian British authors a more flexible means of challenging the dominant discourses of race, gender and cultural identity. Moreover, analysing these novels in this way has demonstrated certain limitations and blind spots of both existing feminist and postcolonial theories of autobiography and life writing and of literary criticism of recent black and Asian British women's fiction. I have used the broader term 'life writing' to describe the six selected novels as they are not autobiographies but fictions that incorporate autobiographical material and strategies. This capacious term appropriately describes these novels that experiment with autobiographical strategies and forms, and in the process operate along the borderlines between autobiography and fiction. I have argued that the novel form of life writing is ideally suited for engaging with issues of racism and sexism, and for representing these authors' personal experiences of being black or Asian in Britain.

What is distinctive about these novelists is that, whereas earlier generations of black and Asian British women writers often foregrounded a collective identity

in forging a politics of resistance against racism and sexism in Britain, for the six novelists discussed here, individual subjectivities are more important. What they produce are narratives that re-assert the priority of the individual subject in relation to collective identities such as 'women' or 'Black British'. As such, these six novelists' self-inscriptions reveal new ways of understanding the black and Asian female experience of post-1990s Britain as an individual rather than collective experience.

The works of an earlier generation of black and Asian British women writers frequently appeared in anthologies and were often written in the form of short stories and poetry. However, as these writers developed an audience for their work, and publishers became more confident in the markets for it, a number of writers began to get their first novels accepted, and at the same time exploring their distinctive styles. Inevitably, such explorations impacted on the narrative structure of the novels, and a major characteristic of black and Asian British women's life writing in the 1990s is the tendency to experiment with two forms of narrative. The first form is exemplified by Perera, Srivastava and Traynor, who use linear narrative structures that follow the definitions of autobiography as traditionally conceived. In the hands of these three authors, however, the linear form becomes both a powerful strategy of engaging with the orthodox conventions of the genre, and a means of self-assertion. The second form of narrative is exemplified by Levy, McLeod and Roy, who found the need to experiment with the structural conventions of the genre and narrate their experiences in more fragmented and non-linear ways.

The six novelists examined here also differ from their more well-known successors Zadie Smith (2000) and Monica Ali (2003), whose works swiftly attracted extensive critical and popular attention and were often seen as exemplars

a of millennial multiculturalism.¹ The canonical status swiftly attributed to Smith and Ali produced a blindspot that obscured the diversity of the writers that preceded them. Moreover, the extensive marketing of Smith and Ali risks confirming and reproducing the dominant structures of power that who and in what ways black and Asian British women are represented. In other words, the singling out of Smith and Ali as female representatives of multiculturalism may indeed serve to contain and manage the subversive nature of black and Asian British women's writing within the politics of New Labour multiculturalism.²

Complementing my emphasis on the importance of life writing as a critical lens for analysing the six selected novels is an argument that they also raise important questions about autobiography and life writing theory. For example, orthodox descriptions of autobiography have principally focused on mainly male narratives that chronicle his individual life and the development of his personality separate from his surroundings. Such narratives are often linear accounts that order the subject's life into a unified, centred whole.³ By contrast, Levy's McLeod's and Roy's novels promote models of dispersed subjectivities, and in terms of form, these novels are characterised by their irregularity and non-linear structure. Such fragmented versions of subjective identity and narrative form corroborate much existing feminist autobiography and life writing theory. In other ways, Perera, Srivastava and Traynor do not promote fragmented or hybrid subjectivities and their novels follow the conventional linear structure, but they foster individual subjective identities that are relational and challenge the teleology of the unified masculine autobiography.

¹ Head, p. 106.

² Huggan, p. 119-20.

³ Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract', p. 193.

My analysis also extends existing postcolonial autobiography and life writing theory. For instance, the concept of 'autoethnography' has often been used to characterise autobiographical narratives that represent the marginalised group to the dominant surroundings. While the concept usefully explains the subversive potential of autobiography and life writing that was also found in the six novels I analysed, it also implies that the individual only speaks on behalf of the collective. In order to avoid this burden of representation, these six novelists utilise life writing to resist such containment and represent themselves in as individuals in multiple narratives.

My focus on life writing also raises concerns over certain aspects of existing black British cultural theory. It is commonly argued that black and Asian diasporic identities are hybrid, emerging between various overlapping historical narratives.⁴ However, the concept has its limitations when applied to three of the novels under scrutiny in this thesis. Perera, Srivastava and Traynor do not engage in any sustained conversation with the histories of their parents' homelands in South Asia or Africa. Indeed, they narrate their individual subjective identities as belonging to Britain. Such representations challenge the idea of the in-between nature of diasporic identities.

Certain themes recur in these novels, and my discussion groups them accordingly in terms of location, trauma and family. In the 1970s, urban spaces were often constructed through the discourses of race. In other words, certain locations – often Brixton and the East End – became vested with racial meaning with blacks and Asians often confined to particular areas of London.⁵ Whereas the conjunction between the formation of subjectivity and the location of belonging has received little attention within conventional autobiography and life writing

⁴ Rutherford, p. 211.

⁵ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 311.

theory, it has been of pressing concern to postcolonial critics.⁶ My analysis in Chapter 1 of Perera's and Srivastava's novels revealed new and interesting correspondences between the politics of location and the formation of selfhood. In *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*, it was clear that Perera's main character located her individual subjective identity in London as distinct from her mother's sense of belonging in Sri Lanka. Her belonging in London is predicated on a different experience of diaspora than that of her mother; indeed, for the protagonist there is no desire for a homeland elsewhere. Moreover, while not oblivious to the struggles of 'Black' people in the East End of London and the ways in which such areas have become vested with racial meaning, Perera expands such urban geographies by narrating her subjective experience into another area of London. Through the use of pop cultural references, life writing becomes a strategy for Perera to assert her cultural identity into mainstream British history of the 1970s that is less concerned with issues of racism and migration. A similar concern with intergenerational differences in the experience of diaspora was found in Srivastava's novel set in early 1990s London. The parents' return to India is contrasted with the protagonist's sense of belonging in London. Furthermore, setting up an urban/rural divide, the main character situates her subjective experience of London in contrast with her English boyfriend's rural identity. The intimate urban geography mapped out by Srivastava indicates a familiarity with and belonging in London not found in earlier generations of Asian writing about London, and contributes to the de-racialisation of urban spaces.

In the postwar years, migration to Britain from the former colonies in the West Indies was often accompanied by a desire to forget the traumatic histories of

⁶ Moore-Gilbert, p. 66.

slavery and colonialism.⁷ Such repression and failure to pass on collective memories and imagine them within Britain has frequently led to a crisis of identity for black people in Britain. My investigation in Chapter 2 of the need to re-imagine such collective traumatic memories in the novels of Levy and McLeod demonstrated how life writing can act as a conduit for engaging with the politics of remembering. In Levy's novel, the belated effects of trauma manifest themselves following a series of racist incidents. In an effort to resist such racist representations, the strategies of life writing enable Levy to re-imagine those collective histories within the shared history of Britain. Her novel exposes the intricate connections between contemporary Britain and its imperial past. The use of life writing enables Levy to work through the crisis of identity and serves to pass on memories of complex family histories. McLeod's novel provides another powerful example of the ways in which forgotten collective histories can cause a crisis of identity within the subject. *Stuck Up a Tree* is testimony to the traumatic effects of repressing the past for both the parental generation who migrated to Britain and the contemporary generation who has no direct experience of migration. As the Windrush-generation dies, the possibilities of passing on collective memories of slavery, colonialism and migration through the family also disappears. However, through the use of life writing, McLeod's novel serves as a form of postmemory, in which the author re-imagines her childhood and connects with her collective past. The novel serves as a warning of the dangers of forgetting and repressing collective memories.

The possibilities of handing on memories from one generation to the next, however, suggest an unbroken family narrative that carries within it a certain cultural identity. For mixed-race children who have spent time in foster care, such

⁷ Gandhi, p. 4.

models of family narratives are deeply complicated, and their experiences challenge prevailing ideas of family, race and nation. My examination in Chapter 3 of the ways in which Roy and Traynor engage with such questions revealed how the strategies of life writing enabled Roy to re-imagine her individual identity into the collective narratives of her father's African heritage. Her irregular search narrative situates her individual experience within three overlapping historical narratives that are part of the black diaspora experience in Britain. For Traynor, however, life writing becomes a strategy for deconstructing the idea of a coherent 'Black' collective identity. As bonds are broken between her individual experience of growing up mixed-race in foster care and the collective black experience of slavery, colonialism and migration, the linear narrative of her novel accommodates her sense of selfhood in British society. In both novels, the strategies of life writing enable these two authors to create family models that defy conventional ideas of race and nation.

If autobiography and life writing once belonged in the hands of the dominant groups, the six post-1990s black and Asian British women's novels examined in this thesis suggest that it is both possible and important to challenge the dominant discourses of race, gender and cultural identity through the more fluid and flexible forms of life writing. As contemporary black and Asian British women authors continue to explore the plurality of their individual subjectivities in life writing, my focus on authors from the 1990s provides only a starting point for further studies. However, my thesis also suggests that, as questions of racism, migration and globalisation continue to influence contemporary British society, there is a real need to engage critically with the ways in which black and Asian people in Britain are represented and represent themselves. To this end, critics of life writing and autobiography provide key theoretical insight, but they must

attend to such questions in order to unlock the potential of black and Asian British women's life writing.

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY HISTORICAL AND LITERARY EVENTS, 1985-2005

While this chronology is inevitably selective and not exhaustive, every effort has been made to make it as representative as possible. Included are key historical events such as the riots in 1985 and the terrorist attacks on London in 2005, the establishment of various black and feminist publishing houses, journals and centres, and opening of plays and release of films.

1985 Peepal Tree Press is established; Karia Press is established; Riots in Handsworth, Birmingham, and Broadwater Farm, Tottenham, London.

Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985); Amryl Johnson, *Long Road to Nowhere* (London: Virago, 1985); Barbara Burford, Gabriela Pearse, Grace Nichols, Jackie Kay, *A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets* (London: Sheba, 1985); Joan Riley, *The Unbelonging* (London: Women's Press, 1985); Sharan-Jeet Shan, *In My Own Name* (London: Women's Press, 1985)

1986 *Handsworth Songs*, a documentary by Black Audio Film Collective, directed by John Akomfrah, is released. It was designed to give an alternative, black perspective on the state of race relations in Britain, which had been in the forefront of mass media coverage throughout most of 1985; Serpent's Tail is established.

Barbara Burford, *The Threshing Floor* (London: Sheba, 1986); Beryl Gilroy, *Frangipani House* (London: Heinemann, 1986); Prahbu S. Guptara, *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* ([Sydney], [Oxford]: Dangaroo

Press, 1986); Grace Nichols, *Whole of a Morning Sky* (London: Virago, 1986); Sylvia Paskin, Jay Ramsay and Jeremy Silver, *Angels of Fire: An Anthology of Radical Poetry in the '80s* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986); Janice Shinebourne, *Timepiece* (London: Peepal Tree, 1986)

- 1987 Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant elected first British Members of Parliament (Labour) of African descent; the first Black History Month is observed in October throughout the UK. It aims to disseminate information on positive black contributions to British society, to heighten the confidence and awareness of black people in their cultural heritage, and to promote knowledge of black history and experiences; *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, with a screenplay by Hanif Kureishi and directed by Stephen Frears is released. Meera Syal played the role of Rani; Tamarind is established by Verna Annette Wilkins; *Third Text* is established; The Commonwealth Writers' Prize is established.

Rachel Barton, *The Scarlet Thread: An Indian Woman Speaks* (London: Virago, 1987); Da Choong, Olivette Cole-Wilson, Bernardine Evaristo and Gabriela Pearse, *Black Women Talk Poetry* (London: Black Womanstalk, 1987); Rhonda Cobham & Merle Collins, *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Merle Collins, *Angel* (London: The Women's Press, 1987); Illona Linthwaite, *Ain't I a Woman!: Poems by Black and White Women* (London: Virago, 1987); Laretta Ngcobo, *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1987); Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by herself* (London: Pandora, 1987 [1831]); Ravinder Randhawa, *A Wicked Old Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1987); Joan Riley, *Waiting in the Twilight* (London: Women's

Press, 1987)

1988 Centre for Caribbean Studies established at London Metropolitan University.

Asian Women Writers' Workshop, *Right of Way* (London: Women's Press, 1988); David Dabydeen & Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (London: Hansib, 1988); Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis and Pratibha Parmar, *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (London: Sheba, 1988); Leena Dhingra, *Amritvela* (London: Women's Press, 1988); Joan Riley, *Romance* (London: Women's Press, 1988); Amryl Johnson, *Sequins for a Ragged Hem* (London: Virago, 1988)

1989 Ayatollah Khomeini pronounces *fatwa* calling on all good Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie and his publishers (rescinded in 1998). Book burnings and demonstrations in Bradford.

Maggie Butcher, *Tibisiri: Caribbean Writers and Critics* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989)

1990 John Major (Conservative) becomes Prime Minister (-1997); Nelson Mandela is released from prison in South Africa.

Pauline Melville, *Shape-Shifter* (London: Women's Press, 1990); Laurretta Ngcobo, *And They Didn't Die* (London: Virago, 1990)

- 1991 George Padmore Institute is established by John La Rose; The Centreprise Women's Café is established (-1994); Bogle-L'Ouverture Press is established.

Da Choong, Olivette Cole-Wilson, Bernardine Evaristo and Gabriela Pearse, *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women* (London: Black WomanTalk, 1991); Simi Bedford, *Yoruba Girl Dancing* (London: Heinemann, 1991); Jackie Kay, *The Adoption Papers* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1991); Isha McKenzie-Mavinga & Thelma Perkins, *In Search of Mr McKenzie* (London: Women's Press, 1991); Indi Rana, *The Roller Birds of Rampur* (London: Bodley Head, 1991); Farhana Sheikh, *The Red Box* (London: Women's Press, 1991)

- 1992 The X Press is established.

Chapeltown Black Women Writers' Group, *When Our Ship Comes In: Black Women Talk* (Castleford: Yorkshire Art Circus, 1992); Vernella Fuller, *Going Back Home* (London: Women's Press, 1992); Sunetra Gupta, *Memories of Rain* (London: Orion, 1992); Ravinder Randhawa, *Hari-Jan* (London: Women's Press, 1992); Joan Riley, *A Kindness to Children* (London: Women's Press, 1992); Atima Srivastava, *Transmission* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992); Zindika, *A Daughter's Grace* (London: Karnak, 1992)

- 1993 *Bhaji on the Beach*, with a screenplay by Meera Syal and directed by Gurinda Chadha, is released; Stephen Lawrence is murdered by five white youths in London. No-one has been convicted of the murder.

Sunetra Gupta, *The Glassblower's Breath* (London: Orion, 1993); Bernadette

Halpin and Dorothea Smartt, *Word Up: Words from the Women's Café*

(London: Centreprise, 1993); Valerie Mason-John and Ann Khambatta,

Lesbians Talk: Making Black Waves (London: Scarlett, 1993)

- 1994 Caribbean Women Writers' Alliance is formed following the Caribbean Women Writers' Conference at Goldsmiths College, London, by Joan Anim-Addo; The Saga Prize is established by Marsha Hunt to encourage unpublished Black novelists born in the UK and the Republic of Ireland; Angela Royal Publishing is established by Angela Royal.

Andrea Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (London: Headline Review,

1994); Valerie Mason-John, *Talking Black: Lesbians of Black and Asian*

Descent Speak Out (London: Cassell, 1994); Velma Pollard, *Homestretch*

(London: Longman, 1994); Yvette Richards, *Single Black Female* (London: X Press, 1994)

- 1995 Riots in Brixton following the death of Wayne Douglas in police custody; Mango Publishing is founded.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *No Place Like Home* (London: Virago, 1995); Jean

Buffong, *Snowflakes in the Sun* (London: Women's Press, 1995); Sunetra

Gupta, *Moonlight into Marzipan* (London: Phoenix House, 1995);

- 1996 The Orange Prize for Fiction is established. It is awarded for the best full-length novel by a female author of any nationality, written in English and published in the UK in the preceding year; SAKS Publications is founded by Kadija Sesay,

who also founded the literary broadsheet *Calabash: A Newsletter for Writers of African and Asian Descent*.

Rukhsana Ahmad, *The Hope Chest* (London: Virago, 1996); Andrea Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere* (London: Headline, 1996); Leone Ross, *All the Blood is Red* (London: Angela Royal, 1996); Meera Syal, *Anita and Me* (London: Flamingo, 1996) (winner of the Betty Trask Award)

Vanessa Walters, *Rude Girls* (London: Pan Books, 1996)

1997 Tony Blair (Labour) becomes Prime Minister (-2007)

Bidisha, *Seahorses* (London: Flamingo, 1997); Bernardine Evaristo, *Lara* (London: Angela Royal, 1997); Ifeona Fulani, *Seasons of Dust* (New York; London: Harlem River Press, 1997); Naini Kumar, *The Silent Journey* (Lewes: Book Guild, 1997); Pauline Melville, *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997); Joanna Traynor, *Sister Josephine* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) (Winner of the Saga Prize in 1996)

1998 The 50th anniversary of the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* is commemorated throughout Britain in exhibitions, literary walks, film presentations, conferences, plays, television and radio programmes; *Goodness Gracious Me* (sitcom) airs on BBC. Meera Syal is co-author and cast member.

David Dabydeen (ed.), *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing*, 20: 1, special issue, 'The Windrush Commemorative Issue, West Indians in Britain 1948-1998'; Mike Phillips & Trevor Phillips (eds.), *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998); Tony Sewell, *Keep*

On Moving: The Windrush Legacy: The Black Experience in Britain from 1948 (London: Voice Enterprises, 1998); Onyekachi Wambu, *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain* (London: Gollancz, 1998)

Judith Bryan, *Bernard and the Cloth Monkey* (London: Flamingo, 1998) (winner of the Saga Prize in 1997); Patricia Cumper, *One Bright Child* (London: BlackAmber, 1998); Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998); Pauline Melville, *The Migration of Ghosts* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); Lucinda Roy, *Lady Moses* (London: Virago, 1998); Joanna Traynor, *Divine* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); Nicole Williams, *Without Prejudice* (London: Headline Feature, 1998)

1999 The South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive (SALIDAA) is established.

Patsy Antoine, *Afrobeat: New Black British Fiction* (London: Pulp Fiction, 1999); Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon* (London: Headline Review, 1999) (Arts Council Writers' Award (1998)); Shyama Perera, *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* (London: Sceptre, 1999); Atima Srivastava, *Looking for Maya* (London: Penguin, 1999) (Arts Council Writers' Award (1998)); Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (London: Doubleday, 1999); Vanessa Walters, *The Best Things in Life* (London: Pan, 1999)

2000 Institute of Commonwealth Studies establishes Caribbean Studies, Black and Asian History project (CASBAH)

Debjani Chatterjee, *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry* (Bradford: Redbeck, 2000); Preethi Nair, *Gypsy Masala* (Northampton: NineFish, 2000); Kadija Sesay and Courttia Newland, *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000); Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000) (winner of EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Book/Novel; EMMA for Best Female Media Newcomer; *Guardian* First Book Award; Whitbread First Novel Award; Commonwealth Writers Prize (2001)); Joanna Traynor, *Bitch Money* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000)

- 2001 On September 11, the United States is hit by terrorist attacks in Washington, DC, and New York City; *The Kumars at No. 42* airs on BBC. Meera Syal has over 50 appearances as Sushil Kumar; *Sable LitMag* is founded by Kadija Sesay.

Bernardine Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001) (Arts Council Writers' Award (2000)); Ravinder Randhawa, *The Coral Strand* (London: House of Stratus, 2001)

- 2002 *Bend it Like Beckham*, directed by Gurinder Chadha, is released to great success.

Nisha Minhas, *Chappati or Chips?* (London: Pocket, 2002); Thelma Perkins, *Roundabouts* (London: Mango Pub., 2002); Zadie Smith, *The Autograph Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002); Charlotte Williams, *Sugar and Slate* (Aberystwyth: Planet, 2002)

- 2003 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Doubleday, 2003) (British Book Awards Newcomer of the Year); Karen McCarthy, *Kin: New Fiction by Black and Asian Women in Britain* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2003); Nisha Minhas, *Sari and Sins* (London: Pocket, 2003); Preethi Nair, *One Hundred Shades of White* (London: HarperCollins, 2003)
- 2004 Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London: Headline Review, 2004) (winner of the Orange Prize for Fiction, Whitbread Novel Award, Whitbread Book of the Year, Commonwealth Writers Prize (2005), Orange of Oranges Prize (2005)); Nisha Minhas, *Passion and Poppadoms* (London: Pocket, 2004); Preethi Nair, *Beyond Indigo* (London: HarperCollins, 2004); Sally Worboyces, *Jamaica Street* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004)
- 2005 A series of terrorist bombs hit London on 7 July; Independent Black Publishers Association is established.
- Diana Evans, *26a* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005) (winner of the Orange Prize for New Writers (2006)); Valerie Mason-John, *Borrowed Body* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005); Nisha Minhas, *Bindis and Brides* (London: Pocket, 2005); Preethi Nair, *The Colour of Love* (London: HarperCollins, 2005); Helen Oyeyemi, *The Icarus Girl* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005); Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005) (winner of the Orange Prize for Fiction (2006))

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'The Life of a Prize-Winning Author Has Its Ups and Downs', *PR Newswire Europe*, 23 October 1996, Features
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